This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

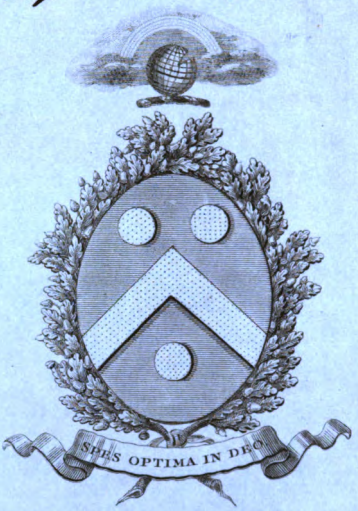
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

Digitized by Google

Hope Essays 106



John Thomas Hope.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAYS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

BY J. BIGLAND,

AUTHOR OF REFLECTIONS ON THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION OF CHRIST;—LETTERS ON THE STUDY AND USE OF ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY;—AND OF LETTERS ON THE MODERN HISTORY AND POLITICAL ASPECT OF EUROPE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

DONCASTER:

PRINTED BY AND FOR W. SHEARDOWN;

LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME, PATERNOSTER-ROW; CUNDEE, IVY-LANE; WILLIAMS AND SMITH, STATIONERS'-COURT, LONDON.—1805.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

JUST PUBLISHED,

Second Edition,

LETTERS ON THE STUDY AND USE OF ANCIENT AND MODERN HISTORY.

Reſpecting the Firſt Edition of this Work, the Reviewers make the following mention;

After pointing out the requiſite qualifications for the reader of hiſtory, the *Monthly Review* for June, 1804, thus proceeds:—"It is on this account that we "conſider a judicious ſurvey of the hiſtory of the world, if it point out the "principal outlines which merit the ſtudent's attention, and be alſo accom- "panied with remarks of ſuch a nature as we have deſcribed above, as a "very uſeful and valuable acquiſition; and it gives us great pleaſure to obſerve, "that this deſirable end is very ſucceſsfully promoted in the collection of "letters now before us.

"Mr. Bigland diſplays in this volume a well-cultivated and comprehenſive "mind. His ſtile is generally correct though not highly poliſhed; his infor- "mation is extenſive; and the many pertinent remarks and inferences, with "which he has enriched this ſummary of general hiſtory, meet our cordial "approbation.

"The letters are twenty-three in number; and although ſome of them are of "conſiderable length, the reader will find no occaſion to make that circumſtance "a ſubject of complaint. A copious liſt of the contents of each is prefixed to "the work, and will prove an uſeful remembrancer after the peruſal of a letter; "ſerving not only to imprint the reflections on the reader's mind, but as a clue "to guide him to the conſideration of the ſubject in a more ample manner at his "own leiſure."

The reviewer then goes into length with ſome of the moſt intereſting extracts, and concludes thus:—

"What enlightened mind will not heartily concur in theſe juſt and liberal "reflections! If our limits permitted, we could with pleaſure proceed to ſtate "the author's view of America, and the probable effects which the diſcovery of "that new world may ultimately produce; but it is time for us to cloſe our "remarks, together with the intereſting volume which has excited them."

"We are well pleaſed with this publication, which, founded on the authority "of the moſt celebrated hiſtorians, exhibits a very uſeful manual for the "younger ſtudent. It is written with great vigour and perſpicuity; nor do we "ſee any ſentiments obtruded againſt which, as they relate either to religion or "politics, it appears neceſſary to caution the young reader. It is an uſeful "undertaking, well executed." *Britiſh Critic, July*, 1804.

"This little hiſtoric digeſt, collected from moſt unexceptionable authors, is "executed with great neatneſs and propriety. The diviſions, or "periods," "are clear and diſcriminated. The different hiſtoric details are diſtinct and "perſpicuous: the reflections juſt and appropriate. On the whole, the letters "claim our approbation." *Critical Review, July*, 1804.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

DEDICATION.

TO

THE WORSHIPFUL THE MAYOR AND CORPORATION OF DONCASTER.

WORSHIPFUL GENTLEMEN,

I HAD it in contemplation to inſcribe to you a former performance, but the uncertainty of its favourable reception by the public, joined to a diffidence of my own merit, deterred me from aſſuming that liberty. I ſhould, indeed, have conſidered it as a flagrant violation of the rules of decorum, and an unpardonable preſumption to have expected the ſanction of ſo reſpectable a body to a work which might, as is often the caſe, have met with the approbation of no one but the author. The ſame conſiderations would, on the preſent occaſion, have operated in a ſimilar manner on my mind, had not the undertaking which I now preſume to offer to your patronage already obtained the ſanction and

Digitized by Google

ſupport of a very great number of the moſt reſpectable characters in this neighbourhood, as well as in many other parts of the kingdom. Under theſe circumſtances I preſume, gentlemen, that, whatever may be its merits or defects, you will not regard it as an impropriety to dedicate the performance to your worſhipful corporation. The liberal encouragement given in the town and vicinity of Doncaſter to my former productions, ſeems to call upon me for this public acknowledgement, and to juſtify, as well as excite, this teſtimony of my gratitude.

With every ſentiment of reſpect and eſteem,
I beg leave to ſubſcribe myſelf,
Worſhipful gentlemen,
Your moſt humble
and devoted ſervant,

J. B.

Roſſington.

Digitized by Google

LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS.

THE BISHOP OF ST. DAVID'S.
THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.
THE BISHOP OF ROCHESTER.
THE BISHOP OF ST. ASAPH.

A

T. Alderſon, Eſq Tickhill
C. Alderſon, Eſq. Ditto
Mr. John Alderſon, Ditto
Mr. Jonathan Alderſon, Ditto
Rev. C. Alderſon, Aſton *(2 co.)*
Rev. J. Alderſon, Hornby, near Richmond
Rev. W. Alderſon, Eckington, Derbyſhire
Mr. J. P. Arrowſmith, Sheffield
Mr. Amery, Poſtmaſter, Beverley
Mr. Aſkham, Doncaſter
Colonel Acklom, Bawtry
Mr. G. Addey, Attorney, Epworth
Stephen Atkinſon, Eſq. Ranby
Jonathan Acklom, Eſq. Wiſeton
Mr. Joſeph Atkinſon, Hatfield
Miſs E. Alſopp, Nottingham
Mr. Adams, Bawtry
Miſs S. Andrews, Hall-Croſs Houſe

B

W. Bury, Eſq. Doncaſter
J. Branſon, Eſq. Ditto
Mr. Brooke, Attorney, Ditto
Col. Bell, Ditto
Mr. Boothby, Ditto
Miſs Baker, Ditto
Mr. G. Binge, Tickhill
W. Brackenbury, Eſq. Clayton

B

Rev. G. Barrington, Prebendary of Durham
H. Bower, Eſq. Tickhill
Mr. Baſkett, Ditto
Rev. M. Brunſkill, Vicar of Sutton, near Hull
Mr. Joſeph Bateſon, Beverley
Mr. Beale, Miſſon
W. C. Bagſhaw, Eſq. Oaks, near Sheffield
Mr. John Brown, Surgeon, 8th or King's Regiment, Doncaſter
Ley Brookes, Eſq. St. John's Col. Cambridge
Rev. G. Buckſton, Aſhborne
Mrs. Bucannon, Bawtry
T. H. Budd, Eſq. Brodſworth
W. P. Boſville, Eſq. Ravenfield
Rev. E Balme, F. R. S. London
Mr. Edward Broome, Doncaſter
Mr. R. Blakey, Bradford
R. Burton, Eſq. Lincoln
Mr. Brooke, Bookſeller, Ditto
Mr. Branſon, Sheffield
Mr. R. H. Barber, Workſop

C

Sir George Cooke, Bart. Wheatley
George Cooke Yarborough, Eſq. Streetthorpe

Digitized by Google

C

Col. Cooke, M. P. Owſton *(6 co.)*
Rev. A. Cooke, Warmſworth
Rev. G. Cooke, Sprotbro'
Rev. J. Cooke, Newark
Mr. J. Cook, Sutton
Col. Childers, Carr-Houſe
Rev. W. Childers, Cantley
L. Childers, Eſq. Doncaſter
R. Cave, Eſq. Ditto
Dr. Chorley, Ditto
Mr. Caley, Ditto
Mr. Chatham, Ditto
Mr. B. Caſſon, Ditto
Mr. Richard Crawſhaw, Ditto
S. Clowes, Eſq. Warmſworth
Mr. Cartwright, Attorney, Bawtry
Rev. C. Conſtable, Maltby *(2 co.)*
Mr. Clark, Barmby Moor
Rev. E. Cartwright, jun. F. A. S. Rector of Storrington, Suſſex
Sir Thomas Clarges, Bart.
Mr. John Corry, No. 59, Princeſs-ſtreet, Leiceſter-ſquare, London, Member of the Philological Society in Manchester
Mr. Cheſsher, Hinckley
Rev. John Carver, Morthen
J. Cam, Eſq. Norfolk-ſtreet, Sheffield
The Rev. Mr. Campbell, Owſton
Mr. Humph. Cheſter, Wadworth
Rev. J. Cox, Gainſbro'
Mr. J. W. Clough, Sheffield
Thomas Clarke, Eſq. Kirkby Hardwick
John Conſtable, Eſq. Waſſand, Holderneſs
Mr. Jonathan Cowliſhaw, No. 2, New Brazenhall-ſtreet, London.
C. R. Clark, Eſq. Ellenthorpe Hall, Yorkſhire

D

William Danby, Eſq. Swinton
J. Dawſon, Eſq. Royils Hall
Mr. Dunhill, Newton
Mr. Dunhill, Grantham
Mr. Dethick, Workſop

D

Rev. W. H. Dixon, A. B. Pembroke-Hall, Cambridge
Rev. M. Dixon, Whiſton
Rev. M. Dixon, Rector of Boughton, Northamptonſhire
J. H. Dixon, Eſq. Trinity Hall, Cambridge
M. Dixon, jun. Eſq. Cambridge
Rev. Joſ. Dixon, Beighton
Mr. Day, Angel Inn, Doncaſter
Mr. Drewry, Bookſeller, Derby
Mr. Davenport, Workſop Academy
W. Dawſon, Eſq. Iſlington
Capt. M'Douall, 8th, or King's R.
Mr. O'Dwyer, Doncaſter
Rev. Mr. Deaſon, Whitworth
Rev. J. Dawſon, Sheffield

E

Lord Eardley, Belvidere, Kent
Counteſs of Effingham, Grange, near Rotherham
David Edwards, Eſq. Edmonton
Mr. Enfield, Tickhill
Lieut. Elſton, Paymaſter, 3d Weſt York
Miſs C. Erſkine, Hall-Croſs Houſe
Wm. Elmhirſt, Eſq. Bag Enderby, *(2 copies)*
W. Elmhirſt, Eſq. Ouſlethwaite
F. O. Edmunds, Eſq. Worſbrough
Rev. G. Egremont, Crowle
Mr. Enfield, Nottingham
Major Elmhirſt, Enderby Hall

F

Bacon Frank, Eſq. Campſall
Miſs Margaret Frank, Ditto
Miſs Mary Ann Frank, Ditto
Miſs Charlotte Frank, Ditto
Miſs Frank, Hull
Rev. Mr. Fawcett, Bawtry
Mr. Fretwell, Attorney, Thorne
Richard Fountayne Wilſon, Eſq. Melton
Mr. J. Fiſher, Tickhill

Digitized by Google

F

General Ferguſon, Doncaſter
Mr. Falconar, Ditto
Mr. Fiſher, Ditto
Miſs Fiſher, Hall-Croſs Houſe
Miſs S. Fenton, Hall-Croſs Hill
Mrs. Foljambe, Bilby
Miſs Foljambe, Oſberton
Mr. Fretwell, Pollington
Mrs. Ann Flockton, Bawtry (2 *copies*)
Mr. Fretwell, Boroughbridge
Mr. Fryer, Raiſtric, near Huddersfield
John Foſter, Eſq. High Green, near Rotherham
Rev. John Foſter, Wickerſley
T. Foſter, Eſq. Scauſby
Mr. Fiſher, Maſbro'
Mr. Ford, Bookſeller, Cheſterfield
Rev. John Furniſs, Ogle, Caſtleford

G

Viſcount Gallway, Serlby
William Gooch, Eſq. Heſley
Mr. Gibbeſon, Haxey
Mr. Greſham, Barmby Dunn
Rev. Mr. Grover, Finningley
Mr. Greaves, Bramwith
Mr. Goddard, Cliff Field, near Sheffield
Mr. John Green, Plater, Ditto
Mr. William Gibſon, Derby
The Country Book Society, Ditto
Mr. John Garratt, London
Captain Gordon, Everton

H

Lieut. Col. Holmes, 10th Regt.
Mr. Haigh, jun. Doncaſter (2 *copies*)
C. Hall, Eſq. Ditto
Mr. Heaton, Attorney, Ditto
Mr. Haugh, Hall-Croſs Hill
Miſs Hood, Ditto
Mr. Hopkinſon, Ditto
Mr. Flower Humble, Ditto
M. Humble, Eſq. Shooter's Hill
Mr. Holme, Sykehouſe

H

J. Holland, Eſq. Ford, Derbyſhire
Mr. Joſ. Hepworth, Rogerthorpe
Mr. Thomas Holmes, Doncaſter
Mr. Tho. Hudſon, Wadworth
Richard Hannam, Eſq. Workſop
Rev. F. H. Hume, Workſop,
Mr. Hawke, Attorney, Braithwell
Mr. John Holmes, Hull
Rev. W. Hedges, Thribergh
Mr Healey, Attorney, Tickhill
Mr. Hartley, Ditto
Mr. John Hill, Miſſon
Mr. G. Hall, Sprotbro'
Miſs Hodgſon, Bradford
Mr. Charles Harris, Ditto
J. Hardy, Eſq. Ditto
Joſeph Hunter, Eſq. Sheffield
J. Hawkſley, Eſq. Park Grange, Ditto
Mr. C. Heigham, Fiſhlake
Mr. B. Hague, Surgeon, Ripon
Mr. T. Hailſtone, F. L. S. Bradford
Rev. Mr. Hodgſon, Campſall
W. N. W. Hewett, Eſq. Bilham
Mr. Hutton, Storey-ſtreet, Hull
W. Hyde, Eſq. Wilſick
Rev. Wm. Hodges, Matterſea
Mrs. Henfrey, Workſop
Mark Huiſh, Eſq. Nottingham
Mrs. Mark Huiſh, jun. Ditto
Mrs. Corn. Huthwaite, Nottingham
Miſs Huthwaite, Workſop
Mr. Heurtley, Leighton Buzzard
Rev. John Hewett, Shireoaks
Mr. Hett, Bawtry
Sir Henry Fitz Herbert, Tiſſington, Derbyſhire
Benjamin Howard, Eſq. London
Mr. Hill, Attorney, Bawtry
Mr. Hays, Hinckley
Mr. Hearon, York

I

Rev. Mr. Inchbald, Doncaſter
Richard Ingram, Eſq. of White Ladies, Worceſter

Digitized by Google

J

Thomas Judſon, Eſq. Doncaſter
Miſs Jordan, Hall-Croſs Hill
Mrs. Jepſon, Auſterfield
Mr. William Jackſon, Crookhill
Rev. Edward Jordan, Meſſingham
Mr. Johnſon, Goldthorpe
J. Johnſon, Eſq. Sandtoft
Mr. William Johnſon, Miſſon
John Jarratt, Eſq. Bradford
Mr. Jackſon, Roſſington Grange
Rev. W. Jackſon, Fillingham
Mr. Jarvis, Doncaſter

K

Sir Charles Kent, Bart. Wadworth
J. S. Kent, Eſq. Hooton Roberts
H. G. Knight, jun. Eſq. Langold
Rev. W. King, Doncaſter
Mr. Richard Kitching, Levels

L

Jas. Liſter, Eſq. Ouſefleet Grange
Mr. W. Lilley, Doncaſter
Mr. John Lawton, Ditto
Thomas Leader, Eſq. Sheffield
Mr. Benjamin Loadſman, Ditto
Mr. Ledger, Carlton
Mr. Lane, Leadenhall-ſtreet, London
Mr. R. Littlewood, Armthorpe
Rev. Mr. Lowe, Wentworth
Mr. Thomas Long, Ripon

M

Hon. Miſs Monckton, Serlby
Hon. Miſs C. Monckton, Ditto
J. H. Mawe, Eſq. Doncaſter
Rev. S. Moore, Vicar of Ditto
Mr. Maſon, Attorney, Ditto
Dr. Miller, Ditto
Mr. Mather, Ditto
Miſs Murphy, Ditto
Mr. Morley, Ditto
Captain Maſſey, Ditto
Dr. Mayo, Ditto
William Mawe, Eſq. Kiveton
Mr. Machin, Loverſall
Mr. Mathew, Bawtry
Mrs. G. Martin, Sandall

M

Mr. Martindale, Newington
Joſeph Marris, Eſq. Bawtry
Miſs Mower, Sheffield
Mr. Moorhouſe, Wilby

N

Rev. W. Newſome, Scruton, near Catterick
The Rev. R. Nares, Archdeacon of Stafford
Mr. George Nailer, Gainſbro'
J. North, Eſq. London
Mr. Norton, Sheffield
Mr. North, Bradford
Mr. Edward Nettleſhip, Blyth
C. Norton, Eſq. near Ripon
Miſs Nightingale, Hall-Croſs Houſe

O

Rev. A. Onſlow, D. D. Dean of Worceſter
Rev. Samuel Oldnall, Rector of St. Nicholas's, Worceſter
Rev. Dr. Orme, Louth
Mr. R. D. Otter, Everton
Miſs Ormſton, Newcaſtle-upon-Tyne
Miſs Oſbourn, Pontefract
The General Circulating Library, Ditto

P

Rev. Sir Henry Poole, the Hooke, Lewes, Suſſex
Miſs Pearſon, Roſſington
Mrs. Peat, South Parade, Doncaſter
Mr. Pearſon, Attorney, Ditto
Mr. J. Pearſon, Ditto
W. Payne, Eſq. Frickley
Mr. Parker, Ripon
Mr. Parkinſon, Brigg
Mr. F. Pearſon, Sheffield (2 *copies*)
Miſs Paſhley, Tickhill
Hugh Parker, Eſq. Woodthorpe
Mr. S. Porter, Engineer, Ferriby Sluice
William Pollard. Eſq. Bradford
Mr. Preſton, Doncaſter

Digitized by Google

R

T. Rimington, Esq. Doncaster
Mr. Richard Ramsey, Ditto
R. Robson, Esq. Ditto
Rev. J. Ramsden, Ditto
Mrs. Robinson, Hall-gate, Ditto
Mr. Richardson, Ditto
Mr. Joseph Roberts, Ditto
Miss Rutherford, Hall-Cross House
Mr. George Raynes, Gainsbro'
Mr. Rhodes, Epworth
Rev. P. A. Reaston, Barlborough
C. H. Rodes, Esq. Barlborough
Mr. Rowntree, Hull
Mr. Raynes, Stone Hill
Mr. Rodford, Bookseller, Hull
Dr. Robinson, Rotherham
W. Ravenscroft, Esq. Bawtry
Mr. Roe, Worksop
Rev. R. Robinson, Norton
Mr. Ridgard, Bookseller, Sheffield (2 *copies*)
Rev. E. Rudd, Thorne
Mr. G. Raynes, Lound

S

Earl of Scarbro', Sandbeck Park
Rev. Dr. Stovin, Rector of Rossington (2 *copies*)
Mrs. Stovin, Rossington (2 *copies*)
Mr. Stanley, Bradford
Mr. John Stringer, No. 24, Austin Friars, London
Mr. Stephenson, Craise Lound
Mr. Sinkinson, Doncaster
Mr. Standish, jun. Ditto
Miss Stanley, Ditto
Miss Smith, Ditto
Mrs. Smart, Ditto
Captain Spilsbury, Ditto
Samuel Shore, Esq. Meersbrook, Derbyshire
Samuel Shore, Esq. jun. Norton Hall, Derbyshire
Mr. Spilsbury, Attorney, Bawtry
Miss Sandys, Ditto
Mr. Simons, Edmonton
Mr. S. Simpson, Cantley
Mr R. Sheardown, Louth (6 *co.*)

S

J. Smithson, Esq. Pontefract
Mr. Sayle, Brightside, near Sheffield
Mr. Sale, Derby
John Shergold, Esq. Worksop
Mr. Joshua Smeaton, Levels
Richard Stonhewer, Esq. Curzon-street, London
John Shirt, Esq. Wales
Rev. Wm. Sanders, Brodsworth
Rich. Stanley, Esq. Barber Wood
Miss Simpson, Lindrick House, Tickhill
J. Shilleto, Esq. Ulleskelf (2 *co.*)
Rev. John Simpson, Hemsworth
Rev. George Smith, Sheffield
Mr. J. W. Smith, Hayfield
Mr. William Smith, Sutton

T

Rev. T. F. Twigge, Tickhill, (2 *co.*)
Mrs. Tunnicliff, Doncaster
Mr. C. Tootle, Ditto
Mr. J. Tootle, Ditto
Mr. M. Thompson, Surgeon, Ditto
Mr. Turner, Rossington
Mr. Taylor, Letwell
Mr. Thistlewood, Bawtry
Mr. Joseph Thackray, Gainsbro'
R. Turner, Esq. Sheffield
Samuel Tooker, Esq. Moorgate
Mr. Thompson, Atty. Sheffield
Mr. Thorpe, Hull
Mr. Thomas Turton, Hatfield
Mr. Taylor, King's or 8th Reg.

V

J. Verelst, Esq. Woodhead
Mrs. Vernon, Doncaster

W

Col. Wrightson, Cusworth
Mrs. Wrightson, Ditto
St. A. Warde, Esq. Hooton Pagnell
George Western, Esq. Derby, Surveyor G. P. O.
Mrs. Wynch, Doncaster
T. Woodcock, Esq. Ditto (2 *co.*)

Digitized by Google

W

John Wright, Eſq. Doncaſter
Mr. William Whitaker, Ditto
Miſs M. Walker, Ditto
St. A. Warde, Eſq. Hatfield
Mr. William Morley, Doncaſter
Miſs Warner, Hall-Croſs Houſe
Miſs White, Ditto
Dr. Webſter, Ditto
Rev. J. Whitehouſe, Rector of Armthorpe
Rev. H. Watkins, jun. Barmbro'
Miſs Ward, Sheffield
Mrs. Wordſworth, Wadworth
Mrs. Wilſon, Elmſall Lodge
T. A. Warde, Eſq. Sheffield
S. Walker, Eſq. Aldwarke
Rev. H. Watkins, Coniſbro'
Mr. Wells, Booth Ferry
Mrs. J. White, Edinbro'
Mr. J. Wilcockſon, Louth
Mr. Wright, Holmſcarr
Rev. J. Whitaker, Garforth, near Leeds
Miſs Wright, Derby
Joſeph Walker, Eſq. Clifton, near Rotherham
Lieut. Wrightſon, 3d W. Y.
Holland Watſon, Eſq. Worksop
Mrs. Whitaker, Loughton Hall, Eſſex
Dr. Warw'ck, Rotherham

W

Mr. Wilkinſon, Epworth
J. Woodyeare, Eſq. Crookhill
Willam Wragg, Eſq. Bighton Lodge
Mr. Whitaker, Harworth
Capt. Warris, Sheffield
Joſhua Walker. Eſq. Clifton, near Rotherham
Mrs. Weſtby, Clough
Miſs Wilſon, Rotherham
Mr. Woolham, Ditto
Mr. James Woollen, Sheffield
Captain White, R. N. Doncaſter
Rev. F. Wrangham, M. A. F.R.S. Hunmanby
J. White, Eſq. Doncaſter
Lieut. Col. Wroughton, Adwick-le-Street
Mr. W. Workman, Owſton
Mr. William Wright, Holm Carr, near Worksop
Mr. Watkin, No. 11, Fleet-ſtreet, London
Rev. W. Wilſon, Leighton Buzzard
Rev. T. Wetherherd, Doncaſter
Mr. J. Williamſon, Sutton

Y

Mr. Charles Younge, Sheffield

Digitized by Google

PREFACE.

THE writing of miſcellaneous pieces has been ſanctioned by the examples of authors of deſerved celebrity, and has exerciſed the talents of a Franklin, a Shenſtone, a Knox, and many others, with whoſe elegant compoſitions I have not the arrogance to place my feeble productions in the ſcale of compariſon. Of the multitude of performances of this kind preſented to the public, the greateſt part, however, have been favourably received. This ſpecies of writing, indeed, is always new, and its materials are never exhauſted; for among the variety of ſubjects of obſervation and enquiry which daily offer themſelves to the contemplative and inquiſitive mind, ſomething may always be found to which the reader had not before directed his attention, or which he has not ſeen exhibited in the ſame light, nor painted in the ſame colours. Sometimes he perceives his own ideas delineated, at

Digitized by Google

other times new ones preſent themſelves which he examines, appreciates, adopts, or rejects. This affords to the mind exerciſe and entertainment. The reader ſits as judge deciding on the juſtneſs or the inaccuracy of the obſervations, and on the truth or fallacy of the arguments. If theſe meet with his approbation, it gives him pleaſure to ſee his own opinions juſtified and confirmed, if they incur his cenſure, he ſtill finds his mind invigorated and expanded by the colliſion of his thoughts with thoſe of the author.

One reaſon, perhaps, which is peculiarly adapted to render works of this kind pleaſing to a great number of readers is, that a variety of ſubjects being conciſely treated, the mind is not fatigued by directing its attention too long towards one point. This neceſſary brevity alſo affords to the reader an opportunity of making additional reflections, and always leaves him ſomething to diſcover, which is not the caſe when the ſubject is purſued to its laſt ramifications.

In regard to the Eſſays now offered to the public, they have, for the moſt part, been ſuggeſted at different times and on different occaſions by the caſual obſervation of various circumſtances, or the examination of accidental

Digitized by Google

topics of converſation and points of diſcuſſion. Some of the ſubjects may, perhaps, at the firſt view, appear trifling, but, after a little reflection, they will probably exhibit themſelves in a more important point of view. Thoſe of toleration, the propriety of a national religion, the diverſity of religious opinions, on education, and ſeveral others, muſt be deemed of great importance as relating both to the hiſtory and philoſophy of the human mind, and to the organization of civilized ſociety. The thoughts on popular ſuperſtitions may be conſidered by ſome as carried to a prolixity ſomewhat too diffuſe; but whoever has long and attentively obſerved their general prevalence, their extenſive influence, and their diſagreeable and ſometimes diſaſtrous effects, of which ſome recent inſtances are unfortunately too notorious, will be convinced that the ſubject would merit a volume rather than an Eſſay. The ableſt pen could not be better employed than in combating and endeavouring to remove this mental degradation, nor could a more eſſential ſervice be rendered to the juvenile part of mankind, whoſe ideas are generally vitiated and tinctured with ſuperſtition in early youth, and form themſelves into monſtrous and abſurd aſſociations which often remain unrectified in their riper years.

Digitized by Google

THE Eſſay on a town and country life was deſigned for the two-fold purpoſe of rectifying the notions of thoſe who, being totally unacquainted with the latter, form an ideal picture of it from illuſory repreſentation; and of ridiculing, and, if poſſible, eradicating that general propenſity to ſcandal ever obſervable where ſocial intercourſe is contracted, and the mind but ſlightly cultivated. Detraction, whether conſidered as contrary to chriſtian benevolence, or eſtimated by the ſtandard of Pagan morality, is one of the moſt deteſtable as well as moſt common vices of ſociety. The old and the young, the ſerious and the gay, find a malignant pleaſure in examining and expoſing the conduct of their neighbours, while they neglect to reform their own, aſperſe the moſt virtuous characters merely for their own amuſement, and often without any deliberate evil intention, through mere thoughtleſſneſs, give ſtabs almoſt as fatal as thoſe of the aſſaſſin's dagger. This ſubject would certainly be worthy of an abler pen; for if we muſt give an account of every word that is merely idle, how ſhall we anſwer for thoſe that have the moſt miſchievous tendency, and are often productive of the moſt diſaſtrous effects.

Digitized by Google

In every literary performance, on whatever ſubject it may be, the riſing generation is an object of which we ought never to loſe ſight. Thoſe who are advanced in years, muſt, in a ſhort time, make their exit from the ſtage, and thoſe who are in the meridian of life will ſoon follow them in the ſame road. The younger claſs of readers have their parts yet to begin, and perhaps to act for a conſiderable length of time; and on the tone of their minds, the future happineſs or miſery of the world in a great meaſure depends. As thoſe Eſſays are in part intended for their uſe, care has been taken not to introduce any ſubject or uſe any expreſſion that might tend to vitiate juvenile ideas.

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS.

PAGE

ESSAY I.

On the Univerſal Purſuit of Happineſs - - - - - - - - - - - - - 1

ESSAY II.

On the Abſurdities of Moral Writers - - - - - - - - - - - - - 12

ESSAY III.

On the Conſolations of Religion in Temporal Difficulties - - - - 22

ESSAY IV.

On National Eſtabliſhments in Religion - - - - - - - - - - - - 29

ESSAY V.

On Univerſal Liberty of Conſcience - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 59

ESSAY VI.

On Eccleſiaſtical Emoluments - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 75

ESSAY VII.

On the Cauſe of the Diverſity of Religious Opinions, and the Inducement it affords to mutual Toleration and univerſal Charity - 90

ESSAY VIII.

On Education - 102

ESSAY IX.

On the ſame - 118

ESSAY X.

On Popular Superſtitions - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 133

Digitized by Google

PAGE

ESSAY XI.

On Omens - 151

ESSAY XII.

On Ghoſts and Apparitions - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 157

ESSAY XIII.

On the ſame - 169

ESSAY XIV.

On the ſame - 179

ESSAY XV.

On the Arts of Sorcery, &c. - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 200

ESSAY XVI.

On the Eſtimation of Characters and their Modification by Circumſtances - 207

ESSAY XVII.

On the ſame - 226

ESSAY XVIII.

On the Knowledge of Mankind - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - 240

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ESSAYS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS.

ESSAY I.

ON THE UNIVERSAL PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

HAPPINESS, real or imaginary, ever has been, and ever will be, the grand and indeed the only object of human purſuit; for whatever purpoſe we endeavour to accompliſh, whatever good we wiſh to acquire, the eagerneſs of deſire is always proportioned to the addition that we ſuppoſe the accompliſhment or the acquiſition will make to the meaſure of our felicity.

This univerſal purſuit after happineſs, variouſly directed and infinitely diverſified according to the difference of inclinations, circumſtances, opportunities and proſpects, is the grand ſtimulus of human action. It is implanted in human nature, and exhibits a lumin-

Digitized by Google

ous view of the plan of Divine Providence. For the attainment or the increaſe of happineſs, the huſbandman cultivates the ground, the mariner croſſes the trackleſs ocean, the merchant engages in commercial ſpeculations, the ſoldier hazards his life in the field of battle: in all countries, in all ages, in every rank of ſociety, and in every ſituation, men are continually employed in ſtriving to procure ſome real or fancied good, or to avoid ſome real or imaginary evil.

If we conſider the precarious tenure, and at the beſt, the ſhort lived nature of the objects of human purſuit, we ſhall be inclined to wonder that rational beings can be ſo intent on ſuch unſubſtantial acquiſitions. It has ſeldom been found that when attained, they have given the ſatisfaction expected to reſult from enjoyment, or correſponded with the ideas they had excited in the mind. Riches are almoſt the univerſal object of purſuit among all ranks of people; but, if we compare experience with expectation, and carefully diſtinguiſh between idea and reality, we ſhall perceive that they are ſeldom found to confer happineſs; and that the labour of acquiſition is ſcarcely ever compenſated by the pleaſure of enjoyment. Poverty is the univerſal object of dread and diſlike, and the

Digitized by Google

evil which men endeavour the moſt aſſiduouſly to avoid; but the labours and hardſhips which they frequently undergo in their efforts for this purpoſe are often greater than all the calamities which indigence could produce. Riches, it muſt however be confeſſed, although not to be conſidered as a poſitive good, afford the means of procuring a multiplicity of advantages and real comforts. Magnificent palaces, ſplendid equipages, the poſſeſſion of an extenſive and ſelect library, the converſation of the learned, the elegant productions of the polite arts; all theſe comforts of life lie within the reach of the man of opulence. In ſeaſons of ſickneſs and languor, and in the debility of old age, he can readily procure all the comfort and ſupport that human aſſiſtance is able to give. At all times, and on a thouſand occaſions, he may experience the ſupreme delight of relieving the poor and diſtreſſed. He can be a father to the orphan and a friend to the friendleſs. The man who poſſeſſes wealth, if his mind be turned to acts of beneficence, can ſcarcely walk in the ſtreets without meeting with opportunities of relieving helpleſs indigence, of removing the effects of misfortune, and of raiſing the drooping head of deſpondency. He can ſcarcely go out of his doors without finding it in his power to

Digitized by Google

enjoy the greateſt of all pleaſures, the pleaſure of doing good. Riches, when conſidered in this light, and uſed in this manner, are certainly a great bleſſing. They afford the means of avoiding innumerable evils and of procuring a vaſt aſſemblage of pleaſures, and muſt be a ſource of ſatisfaction to a mind qualified for the enjoyment of the gifts of fortune. A number of circumſtances, both phyſical and moral, muſt however, concur to render a man happy in the poſſeſſion of wealth even when acquired by inheritance. A ſound conſtitution and a competent ſhare of health, a taſte for literature and the polite arts, a beneficent diſpoſition and feeling mind, muſt all combine to give a reliſh to the enjoyment of riches. Daily experience ſhows, that a very great number of thoſe who are poſſeſſed of affluence, are totally unqualified for the enjoyment of that happineſs, which might be expected from ſuch accumulated means of procuring a variety of pleaſures; and our obſervations need not be very extenſive to enable us to perceive, that thoſe who poſſeſs the moſt ample fortunes do not always enjoy the greateſt portion of felicity, even when health and ſtrength concur to give a zeſt to the bleſſings of life. The remark may be carried yet farther, and it may, with truth be aſſerted, that many who

Digitized by Google

poſſeſs great riches without labouring under any conſtitutional diſtemper, either of body or mind, are notwithſtanding extremely miſerable, more ſo even than many thouſands of thoſe whoſe daily food is earned by daily toil. This is a moral phœnomenon frequently exhibited in human life, and a little obſervation will enable us to trace it to its original ſource. When no phyſical cauſe exiſts to fruſtrate the expectations which affluence may naturally excite, the diſappointment muſt proceed from cauſes of a moral nature, of which the effects may ſometimes be unavoidable, but more frequently may be prevented. Domeſtic misfortunes happen to perſons in the higheſt as well as the loweſt ſtations, and in the midſt of affluence frequently embitter the cup of life. David, when he experienced the ingratitude and treaſon of his beloved ſon, forgot that he was King of Iſrael; royalty had in that moment no charms to ſooth his afflicted mind. Auguſtus, in reflecting on the diſgraceful conduct of his daughter Julia, experienced ſorrows which the pleaſure of wearing the imperial purple could not counterbalance. And Henry I. of England, is ſaid to have never ſmiled after the loſs of his only ſon and heir apparent, in his paſſage acroſs the channel in returning from France. In peruſing the annals of the world, we find, that a very great

Digitized by Google

number of perſons, whoſe names and achievements are the moſt celebrated, and the proſperity of whoſe public concerns fill ſome of the moſt brilliant pages of hiſtory, have been eminently unfortunate in their domeſtic affairs. Many who ſeemed to be placed on the ſummit of human proſperity and greatneſs, have ſeen the cup of felicity daſhed from their lips by the ſudden ſtroke of unavoidable misfortune. The inſtances of this kind, which the hiſtory of human life affords, are too numerous to particularize, and all concur to prove, that happineſs is not attached to any thing of a temporal nature.

But beſides thoſe ſignal and ſtriking misfortunes of the great, which in every age have furniſhed ample matter for the tragic muſe, our daily obſervations will afford a thouſand inſtances of the infelicity of perſons poſſeſſed of affluence, who, without experiencing any of thoſe heavy calamities which are unavoidably ſubverſive of all earthly happineſs, are extremely miſerable. This phœnomenon in ſociety generally originates from the multiplication of our wants, and the extenſion of our wiſhes by the accumulation of wealth. If our deſires were always juſtly regulated and proportioned to the extent of our means of gratification, this

Digitized by Google

inconvenience would not ſo frequently accompany increaſed acquiſition; but when they are extended beyond thoſe limits this conſequence is obvious and unavoidable. Wants are multiplied faſter than our means of ſupply, and affluence degenerates into real indigence; for poverty conſiſts in nothing elſe but an inability of ſupplying our natural or artificial wants. This kind of miſmanagement often reduces the man of opulence to a level with his indigent neighbour. Sometimes it depreſſes him below that level and cauſes the ſhare of happineſs to preponderate on the ſide of poverty; for the labouring peaſant, who is contented with his ſcanty and hard-earned meal, proportioning his deſires to his means of gratification, is certainly a richer man than he who, poſſeſſing many things ſtill wants many more which he cannot obtain. The man who is fully ſatisfied with his homely cottage, his mean furniture, and his ſcanty table decorated with fewer and meaner diſhes than that of his opulent neighbour, is undoubtedly richer than he who poſſeſſing a magnificent palace, a ſplendid equipage, and a richly garniſhed table, yet has the mortification of ſeeing himſelf ſurpaſſed in ſome or all of theſe particulars, and aiming ſtill at ſomething above his preſent ſphere, is involved in factitious difficulties, oppreſſed with artificial

Digitized by Google

wants, and pines with desires, which he is destitute of the means of gratifying. The seat of happiness is in the mind; external things may nourish it, but cannot give it existence. Unhappily, however, it is too commonly made to depend on adventitious circumstances, imperfect in their nature, as well as precarious in regard to their continuance. The mind seldom rests satisfied with present enjoyment, but incessantly creates new objects of desire, and amuses itself with prospects of encreased felicity.

This propensity of the human mind is so general, that we find few exceptions in the wide circle of society. From the poorest to the most opulent, few individuals can be found, who do not desire a higher station than that in which they are placed, some acquisition which they have not yet made, or some pleasure which they do not yet enjoy. There are, indeed, some who profess a perfect acquiescence in their present condition, and seem to indicate no desire to extend their circle of action, or enjoyment, or to move in any higher sphere. Some may have this apathy of mind, from nature, or from long and confirmed habits; but this is extremely problematical. Those who seem to rest perfectly satisfied with their situation, without endeavouring to advance one

Digitized by Google

ſtep beyond the circle in which they move, are generally deterred by the difficulty of the attempt, the apparent improbability of ſucceſs, or the experience of diſappointed trial; and therefore, often fortunately for themſelves, eſteeming the labour and hazard of acquiſition more than a counterpoiſe for the poſſeſſion, make a virtue of neceſſity, and remain in their ſituation with an apparent acquieſcence that grows into an habit, and thus enjoy a degree of happineſs, which others, of a more enterpriſing genius and a more volatile diſpoſition, often fail of acquiring by the greateſt exertions and the moſt perilous attempts.

NOTWITHSTANDING the difficulties and dangers into which individuals often plunge themſelves by aſpiring projects, this reſtleſs ſpirit of enterpriſe in man is productive of incalculable advantages in regard to the ſpecies, and affords a ſignal diſplay of the comprehenſiveneſs of the plans of Divine Providence, whoſe unerring wiſdom has fixed in the human mind ſuch a ſtimulus to exertion, and offered to its contemplation ſuch incentives to arduous undertaking. The wants and the wiſhes of mankind are the impulſive ſprings, which put genius and

Digitized by Google

induſtry in motion, direct the multifarious operations of the moral world, and produce all this variety of ſcenes which ſucceſſively diverſifies its aſpect. By their influence, the operations of the mind are directed to every object that promiſes or can procure the amelioration of human circumſtances. By the exertions of men in the purſuit of real or fancied good, the ſeas are rendered paſſable and diſtant countries acceſſible; the remoteſt parts of the globe are explored, rivers converted into channels of communication, the earth cultivated and covered with cities, towns, and villages; arts, ſciences and literature are invented and brought to perfection; political ſocieties formed and regulated, laws enacted, and mankind civilized. All theſe great effects are produced by the impulſe of paſſion, directed by reaſon. Man is here below the agent of the deity, the inſtrument of his providence; all his exertions are no more than means made uſe of by the Supreme Ruler of the univerſe, in the execution of his great plan formed by infinite wiſdom, executed by infinite power, and calculated for the production of univerſal good.

Nothing could exhibit a more dreary and melancholy ſpectacle than this globe on which

Digitized by Google

we are placed, had not the all-wiſe Creator, in forming man, endowed him with this enterpriſing ſpirit of ſpeculation and of action, and diſplayed to his view objects to excite his deſires and animate his exertions; nor could any condition be more deplorable than that of the human ſpecies, if men had not been inceſſantly actuated by the deſire of its amelioration. Philoſophers have often expatiated on the happineſs of a ſtate of nature, and amuſed us with elaborate diſcourſes and flouriſhing harangues on the evils introduced into the world by civilization, refinement, and luxury; but let us contemplate the whole ſyſtem of the moral world, and examine the complicated mechaniſm of ſociety, and we ſhall ſee that what they call luxury is that which ſtimulates induſtry, forms the baſis of commerce, changes the face of the earth from a dreary waſte into a terreſtrial paradiſe, and improves all the faculties of the human mind.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY II.

ON THE ABSURDITIES OF MORAL WRITERS.

AS it is inconſiſtent with the order of things, that the gifts of fortune ſhould be diſtributed in equal portions to all, as affluence, eaſe, and pleaſure, can fall to the lot of only a ſmall number of individuals, and by far the greateſt part of the human ſpecies muſt lead a life of toil and labour, in the midſt of poverty and in the gloom of obſcurity, it appears to have been the deſign of a number of moral philoſophers to reconcile the great bulk of mankind to their condition, by delineating a diſguiſed and fallacious picture of the good and evil of life.

To ſee a philoſopher who is poſſeſſed of affluence, or at leaſt bleſſed with a comfortable competency, writing a panegyric on the happineſs of poverty, is ſomething truly ludicrous. A perſon who poſſeſſes what is ſufficient to ſupply his wants, and even to procure him thoſe conveniences which are ſuitable to his ſtation, or can contribute to render life eaſy and agreeable, may, indeed, retire into his cloſet at an hour of

Digitized by Google

leiſure to write an elaborate harangue on the bleſſings of poverty, and for want of other employment, may indulge his reveries until the dinner-bell calls him to a plentiful repaſt; the ſmoothneſs or floridity of his ſtile, or the apparent energy of his reaſoning, may amuſe thoſe who have as much leiſure to read as he has to write; but all his declamatory eloquence will never induce the poor man to think his ſituation comfortable, when he is hungry, and cannot procure himſelf a dinner.

"A barley loaf 'tis true my table crowns,
"That faſt diminiſhing in luſty rounds,
"Stops nature's cravings, yet her ſighs will flow."

BLOOMFIELD.

Surely thoſe writers, who thus inſult the underſtanding of their readers, and give the lie to univerſal experience, have never repreſented to themſelves the man of ſenſibility, ſurrounded by his helpleſs offſpring crying for bread, which it is not in his power to provide, or ſeeing them or the partner of his boſom, languiſhing on a bed of ſickneſs, without being able to procure what is neceſſary for their comfort or recovery. They have never contemplated virtue in diſtreſs, or genius cramped in its exertions by chilling penury; nor beheld the miſerable ſpectacle of

Digitized by Google

age and infirmity, ſinking under the burden of labour and want. Such ſcenes however are almoſt every where exhibited: they may be witneſſed in every city, town, and village, if not deſignedly overlooked, and preſent themſelves too frequently to eſcape obſervation. If thoſe miſtaken moraliſts have ever contemplated the ſcenes of woe, ſo common among the lower claſſes of mankind, and yet ſuppoſe them conſiſtent with happineſs, what in the name of common ſenſe is it that conſtitutes miſery?

The arguments and inductions of this miſtaken philoſophy, are ſo common, and the terms "humble but happy ſtation," "contented poverty," "happy obſcurity," and a thouſand cant expreſſions of this nature, ſo frequently occur, that a volume might be filled with quotations of this moral nonſenſe; and from books, it is transferred into the mouths of thoſe who have never experienced this enviable happineſs that poverty brings for its dowry. We are told that the great Frederic of Pruſſia, walking with a French philoſopher, I think the Abbe Mably, and ſeeing a poor old woman, who gained her livelihood by labouring in the gardens, aſleep on a bank, ſaid to his companion, I make no doubt but that old woman is happier than either you

Digitized by Google

or I. Mr. Gibbon, however, ſagaciouſly enough obſerves, "The Prince and the philoſopher might anſwer for themſelves, but I, for my part, do not envy the happineſs of the old woman." At that moment indeed, when found aſleep, her felicity could ſcarcely be called in queſtion; but very probably theſe ſeaſons of ſweet inſenſibility, in the boſom of temporary annihilation, were the only happy intervals that checquered the continued miſery of her life; and if in their waking hours, the King and the Abbe were not happier than the poor old woman, common ſenſe will ſuggeſt, and candour muſt allow, that it was certainly their own fault. Nothing is more common than reflections of the ſame nature as thoſe of the philoſophical monarch and his friend, or rather nothing is more frequently obſerved than inſtances of this want of reflection, which was on that occaſion ſhewn in the converſation of theſe two celebrated perſonages. I have frequently converſed with a gentleman of a philoſophical turn of mind, who although young, healthy, and rich, uſed frequently to aſſert, that his labourers, who toiled and ſweat from morning to night, were happier than he. "They are," ſaid he, "contented in their ſituation," and if he was not ſo, the fault was certainly neither in nature nor fortune, but only in

Digitized by Google

himſelf. Their contentment, however, if real, was only a patient compliance with imperious neceſſity: his might have been entirely voluntary; and if he had placed himſelf a few days in their ſituation, experience, that great maſter of human wiſdom, would have taught him to make a juſt eſtimate of its inconveniences, and have ſhown him how much the balance was in his own favour. This miſtaken mode of viewing the picture of human life, muſt have a pernicious tendency towards the extinction of that benevolence, which ought to glow in the breaſts of thoſe who have it in their power to alleviate miſery, or to favour indigent merit. How, indeed, can we be inclined to commiſerate a a condition which we conſider as ſufficiently comfortable.

It muſt be confeſſed, that many among the very loweſt claſſes of mankind, plunged in ignorance, and ſtrangers to every elevated thought, experience in the purſuit and enjoyment of that ſmall portion of ſenſual pleaſures, which falls to their lot, almoſt all the happineſs of which they are able to conceive any idea. This ſatisfies their deſires and precludes every inclination of a more rational and refined nature. A felicity however, of this kind,

Digitized by Google

proceeding not from ſentiment but from inſenſibility, exhibits a degradation of mind that ought rather to excite than repreſs our commiſeration of a condition, which imperious neceſſity and dull ſtupidity alone, render tolerable. The ingenious Mr. Aiken ſays, "Far be it from me to inſult poverty by declaiming on its advantages, we have had enough of that cant," and it is nothing leſs than conſummate abſurdity to obtrude upon men groundleſs reaſonings, which none but fools will believe. Ought we not rather to paint the good and evil of life in their genuine colours, and repreſent them ſuch as they really are, and ſuch as they will ever be pronounced, by thoſe whom experience qualifies for making a juſt eſtimation?

That the evils of life are not imaginary but real, the univerſal feelings of mankind declare, and bitter experience corroborates the theory of reaſon and ſentiment. It is therefore in vain to attempt to argue men out of their ſenſes, or to make them believe themſelves happy when every feeling which nature has implanted in the human compoſition, informs them, in terms more forcible than language can furniſh, that they are completely miſerable.

Digitized by Google

IMAGINATION may paint ideal ſcenes, or exhibit illuſory views, and rhetoric may deceive by falſe or exaggerated repreſentation, and on many occaſions give to fallacious reaſoning an appearance of truth; but human feelings will prevail againſt the moſt ſubtle argumentation, and triumph over all the deluſions of fancy. The moſt elaborate deſcription of the tropical regions will not warm a perſon who is freezing under the arctic circle, nor can all the powers of imagination draw from the ſnows of Lapland any refreſhing coolneſs, to one who is fainting under the ardent heat of the torrid zone.

POETS and philoſophers, however, have taken conſiderable pains, and both exerted the powers of genius, and employed the ſubtleties of argumentation as well as the flowers of rhetoric, to perſuade mankind that riches, honours, and the other gifts of fortune are burdens and encumbrances, that meanneſs of condition excludes care, that wealth and eminence produce anxiety and ſolicitude, and that tranquillity, contentment, and happineſs, which are ſeldom found amongſt the great, are the appendages of obſcurity and indigence. Their florid declamations however, are no more than mere effuſions of the fancy, the ſophiſtical

Digitized by Google

reaſonings of a theory contradictory to human feelings, and exploded by univerſal experience.

" Content the poet ſings, with us reſides,
" In lonely cots like mine the damſel hides;
" And will he then in raptured viſions tell,
" That ſweet content with want can ever dwell."

BLOOMFIELD.

It ſeems that the ſyſtem of moraliſing here alluded to, has originated from a good intention of promoting the peace of ſociety, by rendering the poor and the unfortunate contented in their ſituation. It may even have been thought an act of benevolence to conceal, as much as poſſible, from the eyes of the indigent and diſtreſſed, the view of their miſery, and to amuſe them with the contemplation of a fictitious happineſs, in order to draw their attention from real hardſhips and misfortunes. But how laudable ſoever may be the deſign, the method is defective. It is founded on erroneous principles, and tends to inculcate a theory ſo directly contrary to the voice of nature, that nothing beneficial to mankind can be the reſult.

If ſuch principles were made the rule of human conduct, the effects would be exceedingly

Digitized by Google

pernicious; but fortunately this conſequence is not to be apprehended; for however ſuch reaſoning may be approved in a didactic poem, or a moral diſcourſe, it is univerſally exploded in practice. If this, indeed, were not the caſe, there would be an end of all laudable enterpriſe, of all induſtrious exertion, and of all improvement in arts and ſciences, manufactures and commerce, or rather thoſe conveniences and embelliſhments of civilized life would never have had a beginning. From a deſire of avoiding the evils of poverty, and of enjoying the bleſſings which riches are the means of procuring, all theſe undertakings originate.

"Impiger extremos currit mercator ad Indos,
"Per mare pauperiem fugiens per ſaxa, per ignes."

"From Europe's coaſts to India's fartheſt ſhores,
"The active merchant roams in queſt of gain,
"Both land and ſeas through ſultry climes explores,
"Flying from want and all its baleful train."

HOR.

If poverty, indeed, had not been ever conſidered as an evil of tremendous magnitude, the active powers of man would never have been called into exertion, but would have remained buried in a ſtate of ſtupid torpidity. If all men

Digitized by Google

had reſted ſatisfied with their condition, without any deſire of its amelioration, or any endeavours for that purpoſe, the human ſpecies would yet have remained uncivilized.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY III.

ON THE CONSOLATIONS OF RELIGION IN TEMPORAL DIFFICULTIES.

SINCE human life abounds with innumerable evils, of which the reality is too well known by thoſe who feel their preſſure; ſince many of theſe are unavoidable by any human prudence, and irremediable by any human efforts; and ſince ideal felicity, although it may help to counterbalance and alleviate, cannot remove actual miſery; it is a matter of the utmoſt importance to find an effectual remedy for that immenſe and multifarious load of calamity, which lies ſo heavy on the far greateſt part of mankind. This, however, muſt not be ſought in that fallacious mode of reaſoning, which would metamorphoſe human feelings, and perſuade men to call good evil and evil good, in oppoſition to common ſenſe and uniform experience. In ſome caſes a misfortune may prove a bleſſing, by preventing a greater calamity, but yet it is a poſitive evil, although productive of a good effect by that prevention.

Digitized by Google

Since all the ſubtleties of logic and all the eloquence of rhetorical declamation cannot extinguiſh human feelings, or alter the nature of things, nor any efforts of human ſtrength or ſkill prevent the approach of calamity, or remove the preſſure of affliction, we muſt look up to a higher principle of reaſoning. We muſt conſider this preſent condition of man as a probationary ſtate, ſhared out to us by unerring wiſdom, for the moſt gracious purpoſes, and for the completion of one vaſt and conſiſtent plan. It is happy for us, that in our preſent ſtate of ſhort-ſighted ignorance, amidſt the miſts which darken the underſtanding, and veil from our eyes the myſterious deſigns of omniſcience, revelation comes to the aid of reaſon, to ſupply its defects, and teach us to make a juſt eſtimate of the good and evil of life.

To diſcover the ſalutary tendency of this mixture of good and evil, which conſtitutes ſo ſtriking and ſo myſterious a part in the great plan of Divine Providence, we muſt have recourſe to religion; not to a religion of ſyſtem, of human fabrication, and partial excluſion, but to that univerſal and enlightened religion, which not confined to ſects and denominations, teaches us to regard the Deity as the univerſal

Digitized by Google

parent and ſovereign of all mankind, extending his paternal care to all his creatures, and not permitting a hair to fall from the head of the meaneſt individual, but by an eternal and irreſiſtible decree. This univerſal and liberal theory exhibits the wiſdom, the power, and the goodneſs of the Great Creator, combined in the formation and government of the univerſe, and diſplays the wonderful harmony reſulting from ſeeming diſcord. It ſhews that the omnipotent and omniſcient Being having endowed man with a certain portion of active and contemplative powers, placed him in a world abounding with objects, to ſtimulate their exertion, proportioning thoſe objects to his means of attainment, providing ſupplies for his wants, and ordaining that a continual ſucceſſion of deſires and gratifications ſhould animate his efforts, and by conſtant exerciſe, invigorate his corporeal and mental faculties.

In this ſtupendous and complicated ſyſtem, it evidently appears, that the all-wiſe Creator has fixed a juſt and admirable proportion. To every inanimate being he has given its particular properties, to every animal its peculiar inſtinct, with objects properly adapted to its operation. To man he has given ſuperior qualities, and

Digitized by Google

implanted in his breaſt ſuch a multiplicity of deſires, and ſuch a variety of objects for their gratification, as inceſſantly excite his activity; thus nothing, in the phyſical or moral world, remains in a ſtate of torpid repoſe. Man, eſpecially the maſterpiece of nature, and lord of the creation, the moſt ingenious in the invention and ſupply of his wants, is the moſt enterpriſing and active.

It muſt, however, be confeſſed, that the invention of artificial wants has introduced into the world a numerous train of evils, as well as of benefits, and however conducive to the happineſs of ſociety in general, has involved no ſmall number of individuals in irretrievable misfortunes. Every thing demonſtrates that in the preſent ſtate of things general good cannot be produced without the admiſſion of caſual evil, and conſequently that the preſent life is only the firſt ſtage of human exiſtence, preparatory to a future ſtate of far greater perfection, in which the ſufferings of virtue will receive an ample compenſation, where all the apparent diſcord of things here below will terminate in perfect harmony, and all partial evil in univerſal good. While uniform experience feelingly convinces

Digitized by Google

us of the hardſhips and difficulties incident to this tranſitory ſtate of probation, the hiſtory of human life proves the ſhortneſs of their continuance; and religion and philoſophy unite in teaching us that every atom in the phyſical, and every event in the moral world, has its place aſſigned, and its purpoſe determined by unerring wiſdom: and that all human affairs are under the direction of univerſal Providence, whoſe preſcient and all-pervading eye at once ſees what is beſt for all.

These conſiderations ought to diſpoſe us not only to a patient, but even to a chearful acquieſcence in the ſituation aſſigned us in the general ſyſtem, confident in the protection and ſupport of a being infinitely powerful, wiſe, and beneficent. Religion teaches us that no creature is overlooked in the all-compriſing view of him who feeds the ravens, and clothes the flowers of the field with a ſplendour, which the royal robes of Solomon, with all their magnificence, could not diſplay. Every created being conſtitutes a part of his univerſal plan, and nothing is in his ſight mean or inſignificant. It is only in the eſtimation made by our finite capacities, that things are accounted great or little, important or trifling; and according to the relations which

Digitized by Google

they bear to us in this tranſitory ſcene, we conſider them as entitled to diſtinction, or unworthy of regard. Among men, thoſe compariſons and diſcriminations muſt exiſt, and thoſe artificial diſtinctions which are eſtabliſhed in ſociety ought to be duly reſpected, as they conſtitute the harmony of the moral world. But the expanſive view of the Author of Nature, embracing the immenſity of ſpace and the whole ſphere of exiſtence, in all its multifarious complexities and minute details, is not analogous to our narrow compariſons and limited ſurvey.

"With him, no high nor low, no great nor ſmall,
"He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all."

Disregarding all worldly rank and eminence, the Sovereign Arbitrator of the univerſe, now more highly eſtimates, and will at laſt, more honourably diſtinguiſh abject poverty and painful labour, born with patient reſignation, than imperial greatneſs obtained by injuſtice or ſupported by tyranny.

When we conſider that every individual moves in the ſphere aſſigned him by the Supreme Diſpoſer, all earthly diſtinctions will appear of little

Digitized by Google

intrinſic value, and eſtimable only, as neceſſary degrees of ſubordination eſtabliſhed by Divine Providence, for promoting the good of mankind by connecting and cementing the great fabric of ſociety. Did we but duly reflect on the ſhort duration of this probationary ſtate, and on our progreſſive approach towards the place of our final deſtination, where the immenſe and complicated plan of Divine Providence will appear clear and luminous, where all terreſtrial diſtinctions will be annihilated, and all temporal ſufferings forgotten in endleſs felicity, we ſhould proceed on our journey through life with cheerful reſignation, and whether we find the way ſtrewed with flowers or with thorns, we ſhould neither be too highly delighted by ſuch unimportant advantages, nor diſcouraged by ſuch trifling difficulties.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY IV.

ON NATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS IN RELIGION.

AS no one is ſo ignorant and inexperienced as not to know that all temporal felicity is extremely uncertain, of precarious tenure, and of ſhort duration, men have always acknowledged it to be equally their duty and their intereſt, to look up to that Being who diſpoſes all things by an irreſiſtible controul, who diſpenſes good and evil to mortals in ſuch a proportion as he pleaſes, and governs all human affairs with an abſolute ſway. They have ever conſidered the ſincere expreſſion of their gratitude for favours received, as the ſureſt means of enſuring their continuance, and in every ſeaſon of diſtreſs, have implored the divine aſſiſtance as their laſt reſource. It is therefore no wonder that religion, true or falſe, has always had a decided and perceptible influence on the human mind. This has long been ſo well known, that the greateſt princes and ſtateſmen have conſidered its inſtitutions as an important object of their attention, and carefully ſuperintended its eſtabliſhments and

Digitized by Google

regulation. But while the ſincere worſhipers of the divinity invariably eſteemed an adherence to its doctrines, and a compliance with its precepts, their ſovereign duty, and the end to which it tends, their ſupreme good, the unprincipled and unconſcientious diſcovered it to be an uſeful engine of power, and a dextrous management of it the moſt certain method of acquiring an uncontrouled ſway over the minds and bodies of men. The legiſlators of antiquity ſo well knew its influence, that they never failed to interweave it with their political ſyſtems, in order to inſpire the people with veneration for laws and ordinances, which would otherwiſe perhaps have ſoon been neglected, and which mankind would probably have deſpiſed, had they not been ſanctioned by religion, and thus rendered ſacred to poſterity.

When religion was uſed to give a ſanction and an authority to ſuch political or legiſlative ſyſtems, as were conducive to the good of mankind, it could not, in one ſenſe, be ſaid to be proſtituted to unworthy purpoſes; for in the ancient ſyſtems of Paganiſm, this was certainly the beſt uſe that could be made of a falſe and abſurd theology. The Pagans had very obſcure notions of divine things. Their philoſophers and

Digitized by Google

legiſlators abſurdly imagined that the knowledge and worſhip of one Supreme and eternal Being, whoſe exiſtence they acknowledged, was a doctrine too ſublime to be communicated to the people, and endeavoured to confine their ideas to the belief and adoration of ſubaltern divinities, ſymbolical creatures of their own imagination. The whole of their religious worſhip conſiſted of pompous ceremonies and ſplendid pageantry. Theſe ſyſtems however, falſe and abſurd as they were, had a powerful effect on the minds of the multitude, and by their influence the ideas of men were in a great meaſure formed. In reading the ancient writers, not only poets but orators and hiſtorians, we always diſcover traces of the prevailing religious ſyſtems of the ages and countries in which they lived, and generally find their ideas in uniſon with their mythology.

Among the Pagans religion was rather a part of their political œconomy, than a ſyſtem calculated to reform the morals of the people, and inſtruct them in the ſocial duties. However, as it had a tendency to cement ſociety, to excite patriotiſm, and to unite and invigorate the political ſyſtem, it was not wholly devoid of utility. In all ages religion has been conſidered of ſo great importance to the intereſts of ſociety,

Digitized by Google

that no civilized and ſcarcely any uncivilized people has ever exiſted, and ſome are of opinion that none can exiſt, without ſome theological ſyſtem, and ſome mode of public worſhip. If then, ſome kind of religion, however erroneous, has ever been thought eſſential to the harmony, or even to the exiſtence of ſociety, how much more a ſyſtem, which teaches mankind the pure worſhip of the Deity, which inculcates the moſt excellent morality, which tends to calm the turbulent paſſions, and reſtrain inordinate deſires, and which enjoins obedience to princes and magiſtrates, love to our neighbours, and univerſal benevolence to all. The chriſtian religion not only inculcates theſe important doctrines, ſo conducive to the good of ſociety, but alſo adduces ſuch evidences of its divine original as have ſtood the teſt of the ſtricteſt enquiry, and ſhows itſelf to have been ſupported by the divine power in making its way in the world, not like the ancient ſyſtems of Paganiſm, or the more modern doctrines of Mahometaniſm, by human means, and in uniſon with human propenſities, but in direct oppoſition to all power and policy, and to all human paſſions and prejudices.

A religion of this deſcription is infinitely better adapted to the intereſts of ſociety, as well

Digitized by Google

as the happineſs of individuals, than any ſyſtem that ever has been or ever can be planned by human policy. The high and awful authority, by which it is ſanctioned, claims the veneration of mankind, and its doctrines and precepts are perfectly calculated for their temporal as well as their eternal welfare. In the purſuit of thoſe great objects, which chriſtianity holds out to our expectation beyond the grave, we ſecure, in the mean time, the poſſeſſion of the greateſt happineſs, and the moſt heartfelt ſatisfaction that human nature is capable of enjoying in this preſent ſtate of probationary exiſtence. Evil, both phyſical and moral, is, in many caſes, unavoidable; for perfect felicity is incompatible with a ſtate of probation. But although phyſical evil be interwoven with the nature of things here below, and none can be exempted from its effects, yet a ſteady adherence to the doctrines and precepts of the chriſtian religion exceedingly diminiſhes the weight of its preſſure, by directing us to a perfect acquieſcence in the diſpenſations of Divine Providence, and by teaching us that whatever may be the means uſed for the accompliſhment of the great deſign, nothing elſe but univerſal good can be the final object of the plan of infinite wiſdom and goodneſs. Moral evil,

Digitized by Google

however, is that of which mankind have in all ages, the moſt ſeverely felt the baneful effects; and one of our poets has judiciouſly obſerved, that

> " Scarce any ill to human life belongs,
> " But what our follies cauſe and mutual wrongs."

The oppreſſion of tyrannical rulers, the factions, ſeditions, and conſpiracies of rebellious ſubjects, civil and foreign wars, treaſons and aſſaſſinations, with a long and multifarious train of public and private calamities, which a volume would not ſuffice even to enumerate, proceed from a want of the general prevalence of chriſtian morality. An eminent writer has left us this judicious and elegant remark, that " If we conſider the contending paſſions of men, this globe ſeems to be the bedlam of our ſyſtem; but if we contemplate the effects of thoſe paſſions, we ſhall be inclined to regard it as the bridewell of the univerſe." This obſervation, which is indeed exceedingly juſt and ſtriking, adapted and expreſſed with peculiar appropriation and energy, perfectly correſponds with that of St. Paul, " Whence come wars and fightings among you, but from your luſts?" If, indeed, that great precept of chriſtianity, which enjoins us " to do unto all men as we would that they ſhould do

Digitized by Google

unto us," were practiſed in the full extent of its meaning and requiſition, we ſhould then ſee no moral evil, except ſuch as might ariſe from the unavoidable miſtakes and miſapprehenſions of finite beings, which the ſame chriſtian precept would diſpoſe them to rectify without the violent deciſion of injurious malevolence.

Such being the benevolent tendency of the chriſtian religion, and ſuch its beneficial effects on communities, and on the particular members of which they are compoſed, it muſt be a national as well as an individual concern. As peace and union, mutual protection and ſupport, and every kind of reciprocal benefits are the primary, the grand, and indeed the only rational objects of the eſtabliſhment of civil ſociety, the baſis of its proſperity, and even of its exiſtence; and as religion, of whatever kind it might be, has ever had a moſt powerful influence on the minds of men, a religion ſo peculiarly adapted to produce thoſe deſirable effects, ought to be one of the principal objects in every legiſlative ſyſtem. And it ſeems that the eſtabliſhment of a national church, upon tolerant and liberal principles, without any compulſatory meaſures for the enforcement of conformity, is the moſt effectual

Digitized by Google

method of propagating and tranſmitting from one generation to another, the knowledge and practice of chriſtianity.

It may, and indeed has often been objected, that the moſt rational ſyſtem of chriſtianity, is to leave to every ſociety or congregation the buſineſs of providing themſelves with miniſters, without any national eſtabliſhment. If all men were truly religious, the plan might tolerably well anſwer the purpoſe; but daily obſervation ſhows that this is not the caſe. In ſome pariſhes, and in ſome ſocieties, miniſters of religion would undoubtedly be maintained by the zeal and liberality of their hearers; but in many others, it is to be apprehended, that the caſe would be far different. The chriſtian, like the Moſaic ſyſtem, ordains that one day in the week ſhould be ſet apart for the performance of religious duties, and there cannot be a better method of inculcating the doctrines and promoting the practice of religion, than that of having places dedicated to that uſe, under the ſanction and ſupport of the civil authority, and regularly diſtributed throughout every part of an extenſive country, where the worſhip of the Supreme Being is celebrated with decent ſolemnity; the doctrines of religion taught and explained, and lectures on

Digitized by Google

chriſtian morality and the ſocial duties, delivered to all who deſire to receive inſtruction. Some ſincere chriſtians think all this unneceſſary, and regard it as no more than a mere outſide religion, a kind of formal chriſtianity. They imagine that they could very well diſpenſe with the national eſtabliſhment, and that they are more edified in their own private ſocieties, than by frequenting the public worſhip. But an impartial view of things, with a little reflection, will ſuffice to convince them, that they reaſon upon wrong principles, and conſequently draw from them an erroneous concluſion. They themſelves may, perhaps, receive greater edification in their own particular aſſemblies, in attending to preachers of their own choice, and to whoſe doctrines they give a decided approbation. This is a conceſſion which they may claim, as every man has an indiſputable right to worſhip the Deity in ſuch a manner as he thinks the moſt acceptable; but ſuppoſing this to be the caſe, in regard to themſelves, are they ſure that it would be the ſame with others? Would the great maſs of the people frequent thoſe aſſemblies, or voluntarily contribute to the ſupport of the miniſters? An impartial obſerver of mankind, may eaſily perceive their diſlike of purchaſing inſtruction, although they may perhaps be willing to receive

Digitized by Google

it as a gift. The inſtruction of the people at large, is, however, an object of ſerious conſideration, as on the purity of their morals the peace and happineſs of ſociety depends. A ſmall number of perſons, who are of a religious turn of mind, or a few individuals, who by philoſophical reaſonings on the fitneſs and propriety of things, and on the order of civil ſociety may, like many of the ancient philoſophers, learn to rectify inordinate deſires, to ſubdue their paſſions, and to accommodate their conduct to the practice of moral and ſocial duties, do not conſtitute the bulk of a nation. The great maſs of mankind have no other religion than what is inſtilled into their minds by eſtabliſhed ſyſtems. They have in the early part of life received ſome general notions, they have ſeen the eſtabliſhed cuſtoms, they have been in the habit of frequenting ſome place of worſhip, and of hearing the inſtructions there delivered, they adopt the creed of the country in which they live, or of the people with whom they aſſociate: this is all their religion, all their morality. They are not in the habit of thinking for themſelves. Few, indeed, have abilities ſufficient to enable them to make a judicious choice, and as few enjoy the leiſure requiſite for religious diſquiſitions. To perſons of ſuch a deſcription, and ſo circumſtanced, a

Digitized by Google

national church is the moſt beneficial inſtitution that human wiſdom could deviſe. It throws in their way ſuch inſtructions, and unfolds to their mind ſuch a knowledge of divine things, as they have neither inclination to ſeek, nor abilities to find.

Since it is evident to every one who has obſerved the ſtate of the moral world, that the generality of mankind have no other knowledge of religion than what national churches inculcate, is there not too much reaſon to ſuppoſe, that without ſome inſtitutions of that kind, they would not have any at all? Some, indeed, have thought differently, becauſe they ſee ſocieties exiſt which diſagree from thoſe churches in what they conſider eſſential points of doctrine; but theſe diſagreeing doctrines, if they be duly examined, their intrinſic value juſtly eſtimated, and their tendency conſidered, will generally be found to be no more than trivial differences of opinion on metaphyſical ſubjects, or ceremonial obſervances, while they all agree in inculcating the love of God and the love of man.

General example and eſtabliſhed cuſtom, have an extraordinary power and influence over mankind. The more the public worſhip is

Digitized by Google

frequented by thoſe who aſſent to its doctrines, the more it will be conducive to the general good of ſociety. It is ſcarcely poſſible conſtantly to aſſiſt at the worſhip of the Supreme Being, without perceiving the mind more enlightened, without feeling a greater deteſtation of ſin, without being more attentive to the admonitions of conſcience, and without more frequent reflections on the vanity of temporal and the infinite importance of eternal things, and above all on the rewards and puniſhments deſtined to virtue and to vice. Theſe reflections, which muſt ſometimes occur, and the habits they muſt naturally produce, have a powerful tendency to improve the morals of the people, and promote the peace of ſociety. Religion, by teaching men to reſtrain impetuous paſſions, and vicious propenſities, humanizes their minds, and is conducive to their preſent tranquillity as well as their future welfare.

The argument which is generally, and in ſome reſpect plauſibly, brought forward againſt national eſtabliſhments in religion, is founded on the circumſtance of Chriſt and the apoſtles not giving in any part of their doctrine the leaſt hint of the propriety of ſuch inſtitutions. Jeſus Chriſt ſay, the objectors againſt national churches

Digitized by Google

never give the leaſt intimation of an intention that the religion, which he came to eſtabliſh, ſhould be in any reſpect connected with the ſtate, and the apoſtles are equally ſilent on that ſubject. The whole tenor of their conduct, as well as that of their Divine Maſter, ſhews, that the object of their miſſion was to eſtabliſh a mode of worſhip of a tendency purely ſpiritual, and unconnected with any political ſyſtems, or with any thing of a temporal nature. This mode of reaſoning, appears at the firſt ſight, ſufficiently plauſible, but to appreciate its merits, we muſt conſider the circumſtances in which chriſtianity was firſt propagated, and bring them into contraſt with thoſe in which the Moſaical revelation was firſt given, as alſo with thoſe in which the religion of Chriſt was finally eſtabliſhed, and ever ſince tranſmitted to the ſucceſſive generations of mankind. The Moſaical law was given to an independent people, as a rule for their ſocial and moral conduct; and although it was a divine revelation, no ſyſtem of religion was ever more intimately connected with the ſtate. It formed the baſis of the Jewiſh government, and the code of the civil laws of the nation. This connexion, between the political and religious ſyſtem of that nation, had always ſubſiſted

Digitized by Google

ſo long as Judea remained independent; and even during the periods of national ſubjugation, the law of Moſes was ever acknowledged as the ſole legiſlative authority, to which the deciſion of every queſtion of right and wrong was ultimately referred. If we conſider that Jeſus Chriſt conformed to all the obſervances, and complied with all the ceremonies of the law, and lived and died a member of the Jewiſh church, the remark that he did not connect his religion with any political ſyſtem, cannot furniſh any baſis of argumentation. The apoſtles, who firſt preached the doctrines of chriſtianity, were alſo ſurrounded with obſtacles, which rendered the alliance of their ſyſtem with political government impoſſible, and the very idea of ſuch a connexion abſurd. The legiſlative authority of every nation declared itſelf hoſtile to their doctrine: The Jewiſh government reprobated it as blaſphemous, and thoſe of the Pagan nations conſidered it as fanatical.

In ſuch circumſtances, it is no wonder that the apoſtles ſhould never, in any part of their writings, ſuggeſt the eſtabliſhment of a national church. To whom, indeed, could they have propoſed ſuch a plan? To the Sanhedrim of Jeruſalem, who had condemned their Maſter to

Digitized by Google

an ignominious death, proſcribed their perſons, and reprobated their principles? or to the Emperor and ſenate of Rome, who would undoubtedly have treated the propoſal with contempt, and the propoſers as madmen, which indeed, they muſt have been, if they could, in their circumſtances, have formed ſo romantic a project! There is not however, any thing found in their writings that authoriſes us to ſuppoſe that they would have diſapproved of ſuch a plan, if any government had taken them under its protection; and it can hardly be doubted, that if ſuch an event had taken place, chriſtianity would in that nation have been much ſooner propagated than in any other. Hiſtory informs us, that at the acceſſion of Conſtantine, the number of chriſtians bore a very ſmall proportion to that of Pagans, in the Roman Empire; and it is evident that it was the eſtabliſhment of a national church, that enabled chriſtianity finally to triumph over Paganiſm, which was not extirpated until the reign of Theodoſius the great. And indeed, it does not appear, that the extirpation of idolatry was affected in any nation of Europe, by any other means than a national eſtabliſhment.

Digitized by Google

THE United States of America are generally held up as an example of a people cultivating the doctrines and morality of the chriſtian religion, without any national church; but it ought likewiſe to be conſidered, that the Anglo Americans are a nation not leſs contra-diſtinguiſhed from moſt others by the peculiarity of their moral circumſtances, than by that of their local and political ſituation. A very great part of them were originally diſſenters, and many of their progenitors had croſſed the Atlantic, in ſearch of an aſylum, from religious perſecution. Theſe fugitives were for the moſt part Zealots for their particular ſects, and having carried with them the ſtrong impreſſion of religious ideas, tranſmitted them to their deſcendents. The firſt coloniſts, in fine, were rather inclined to err on the ſide of fanaticiſm, than to run into the contrary extreme, and conſequently the ſupport of preachers became habitual, and preſcription among them ſupplied the want of national eſtabliſhments. Beſides this, it is to be obſerved, that in the thinly peopled provinces of North America, a leſs propenſity to irreligion prevails, and fewer inducements to immorality preſent themſelves than in the populous countries of the old world. From theſe circumſtances, it may be inferred, that a national church, however

Digitized by Google

conducive it might be to the advancement of religion, is leſs neceſſary on the other ſide of the Atlantic, than in this quarter of the globe.

Causes, which have long and extenſively operated, become through length of time imperceptible, at leaſt to the ſuperficial obſerver, and to trace their operation, it often requires a conſiderable acuteneſs of penetration and accuracy of remark. Religious ſyſtems, ſanctioned by public authority, have been not only the medium through which chriſtianity has been ſo widely diffuſed, but the authoritative rules by which the ſtandard of morality has been fixed. Had not the Moſaical religion been a national ſyſtem, adapted to the circumſtances, and operating on the public mind of a numerous people, it would never have ſubſiſted ſo long ſurrounded with Pagan nations, and amidſt the frequent deviations of idolatrous princes, and a profligate people: at leaſt, the writings of the old teſtament would never have been tranſmitted to us under the ſanction of ſo high an authority as that from which they are received. We could not, at the moſt, have conſidered them as any thing more than the compoſitions of virtuous and ingenious individuals, and conſequently we ſhould have wanted at leaſt, one of the

Digitized by Google

fundamental evidences of chriſtianity. Perhaps we may carry the argument yet farther, and not hazard much in ſuppoſing that if no national church had been eſtabliſhed, we ſhould, at this very time, have been immerſed in a total ignorance of religious matters. Without the illumination diffuſed by theſe inſtitutions, it is very probable that modern Europe would not have preſerved, through ſo many ages of Gothic barbariſm, ſo great a degree of theological knowledge, or ſo regular a ſtandard of moral practice as ſhe has, at preſent, the advantage of poſſeſſing.

It has, indeed, been very juſtly obſerved, that in every country, diſſenters are not in general leſs conſcientious and exact in the performance of religious and moral duties, than thoſe who are members of the eſtabliſhment. It is, however, from the eſtabliſhed church that their religious and moral ideas were originally drawn. Moral principles, inculcated early in life, have a great influence on the heart of man, even after the ſpeculative doctrines with which they were aſſociated are rejected by the underſtanding. The founders of every diſſenting ſect were originally members of ſome eſtabliſhed church, and from that eſtabliſhment had derived

Digitized by Google

thoſe fundamental doctrines of chriſtianity, and thoſe ideas of chriſtian morality, which they have taught to their followers, and tranſmitted to poſterity. The piety, therefore, of diſſenters, however ſincere, or their morals however irreproachable, afford no proof of the inutility of an eſtabliſhed church as a vehicle of general inſtruction. When the matter, therefore, is conſidered in this point of view, which is certainly juſt, diſſenters are under greater obligations to national churches than ſuperficial enquiry would diſcover, as theſe inſtitutions have been the primary ſource of their religious knowledge, and the medium through which they received their theological and moral ideas.

The immortalities, whether true or falſe, that have been imputed to ſome individuals among the clergy of different national churches, or the real or fancied imperfections of thoſe eſtabliſhments, ought not to be conſidered as any ground of objection againſt their propriety. Religion is of divine original, and is a divine impulſe on the human mind; being revealed to man for his uſe and happineſs, the regulation of its external forms was committed to his management, and like every other thing in which men are concerned, will be tinctured

Digitized by Google

with the imperfections of human nature. In religious as well as in political inſtitutions, ſome miſtakes, ſome unavoidable miſmanagement will infallibly be found, owing to human frailty, and ſome abuſes ariſing from human depravity. The want of attention to this truth is often the cauſe of fanaticiſm in religion, and of faction in the ſtate. A vain expectation of finding perfection in human eſtabliſhments, often produces a deſire of innovation, where no alteration can be made without introducing greater abuſes than thoſe which diſaffection pretends to rectify.

Those who beſtow eccleſiaſtical benefices, are not always able to aſcertain the merit of thoſe on whom they are conferred: ſuch a competency of judging would argue a degree of penetration more than human. In every community, religious or political, and in every order of that community, both virtuous and vicious members will be found: this ever has, and ever will be the caſe. Reaſon and experience forbid us to ſuppoſe, that all who are conſtituted miniſters of religion are worthy of that exalted dignity, but no arguments can be adduced to prove that all, or even any conſiderable number of them, in proportion to the whole, are unworthy. To believe that all the

Digitized by Google

clergy of eſtabliſhed churches are pious and holy, would argue a blind ſuperſtition, together with a profound ignorance of the hiſtory of mankind: to ſuppoſe them all impious and immoral, is an opinion contradictory to both reaſon and experience, and which could only originate in the contempt and hatred of religion itſelf. In the church of England, in the church of Rome, in the Lutheran, Calviniſt, and Greek churches, a great number of eccleſiaſtics have been found, whoſe learning has illuminated mankind, and whoſe piety has reflected luſtre on their reſpective denominations. If an impartial eſtimate were made of the virtues and vices of the clergy of eſtabliſhed churches, there is ground for a reaſonable hope, there is even room for a ſtrong preſumption, that the former would exceedingly preponderate; and this is, perhaps, as much as can be expected in any claſs of finite beings. To expect perfection among the clergy of any denomination, is unreaſonable, and inconſiſtent, with an experimental knowledge of human nature. By becoming miniſters of religion, they do not ceaſe from being men, and conſequently fallible.

No rational argument can be adduced to prove, or even to make it appear probable, that

Digitized by Google

the clergy would be more pious if all national church eſtabliſhments were aboliſhed. If the miniſters of religion depended for ſupport on the capricious liberality of their reſpective congregations, they would meet with ſtronger inducements to model their doctrines according to the inclinations of their hearers, and to connive at immorality, than when they are rendered independent by a national eſtabliſhment, and conſequently are not compelled by their neceſſities to comply with vice and folly, and to flatter inſtead of endeavouring to reſtrain the paſſions of mankind.

The members of diſſenting churches, being alſo members of ſociety, as well as thoſe who profeſs the eſtabliſhed religion, are equally intereſted in every thing that tends to promote the peace of the community; for the ſecurity of individuals in regard to both perſon and property, depends on the public tranquillity, of which the general obſervance of the precepts of religion is the ſureſt baſis. This obſervation leads to the diſcuſſion of a queſtion, which has been debated in every country, where any diſſenters from the national religion are found, and has generally received an erroneous ſolution. This queſtion is, whether diſſenters

Digitized by Google

ought to regard it as any injuſtice or oppreſſion, to be obliged to contribute to the ſupport of the eſtabliſhed church?

Dissenters, like others, muſt live in the crowd of mankind, and tranſact their affairs not ſolely with perſons of their own ſect, but with the promiſcuous multitude. It is, conſequently, their intereſt, as well as that of others, that ſome national ſyſtem ſhould be eſtabliſhed for the general propagation of chriſtianity, in order to render the knowledge of its precepts acceſſible to every one, and to bring them forward to the attention of thoſe, who would not, of their own accord, make them the ſubject of their enquiry.

It is true, that in countries where diſſenters enjoy the greateſt freedom, and where liberty of conſcience is fixed on the broadeſt baſis, every perſon, of whatever denomination he may be, muſt, in ſome way or other, contribute to the ſupport of the national church, although he neither aſſents to its doctrines, nor frequents its worſhip. This is the caſe in every country where any ſuch church is eſtabliſhed. Every public eſtabliſhment muſt be ſupported directly or indirectly by the people, and the national

Digitized by Google

expenditure muſt be ſupplied by the individuals of which the nation is compoſed. It is, indeed, as juſt as it is neceſſary, that eſtabliſhments, for the public benefit, ſhould be ſupported at the public expence. We have ſeen the church-lands, in Ruſſia and France, ſeized by the civil power, the former by Catherine II. and the latter by the national convention. The ſalaries of the clergy, in thoſe two countries, are now paid in money. This meaſure neceſſarily involves in its operation every diſſenter, whether ſubject or foreigner, and impoſes upon him the neceſſity of contributing to the ſupport of the national clergy. The ſalaries of the clergy being paid out of the public treaſury, and that treaſury ſupported, as in all other countries, by taxes levied on the national conſumption, every perſon, whether Frenchman or foreigner, who reſides in France, muſt, in proportion to his conſumption of taxable commodities during his reſidence in that country, contribute his ſhare towards the ſupport of the national church, and the maintenance of its hierarchy.

This general obligation of contributing to the ſupport of the eſtabliſhed church, from which thoſe who do not join in its communion, nor attend its worſhip, are not exempted, is regarded by

Digitized by Google

ſome as a perſecuting impoſition, and an act of injuſtice. In this light it is viewed by ſome in this country; and it would be an important ſervice to the public, as well as to thoſe who have imbibed this opinion, ſome of whom are otherwiſe reſpectable characters, to exhibit the matter in ſuch a light as might convince them of their miſtake. To produce this conviction in the minds of thoſe who attentively conſider and know how to appreciate the benefits, reſulting from evil and religious order, from conſcientious morals and ſocial tranquillity, will not be impoſſible: if they judge without paſſion or prejudice, perhaps it will not be difficult. It will be eaſy to demonſtrate, that diſſenters from the national church, derive from its exiſtence and influence, benefits which more than compenſate the contributions which they furniſh towards its ſupport. In this reſpect, there exiſts a conſpicuous and ſtriking ſimilarity between civil and religious eſtabliſhments. In political communities, every member derives from the ſtate legal protection and domeſtic ſecurity, advantages more than equivalent to his ſhare of the expence incurred for its ſupport, although he may not, perhaps, have ſufficiently reflected on the principles of civil ſociety, to perceive and appreciate the benefits which accrue to him

Digitized by Google

from its inſtitutions. If an individual conſidered the difference between living among civilized men, whoſe paſſions are reſtrained by ſalutary regulations, and whoſe actions are under the controul of laws, which afford ſecurity to his perſon and property, and a life paſſed among ſavages, whoſe tumultuous and inordinate deſires are ſubjected to no legal reſtriction, where his life and property muſt every hour lie at the mercy of his neighbours, and where any one who happens to ſurpaſs him in ſtrength, may, whenever he pleaſes, deprive him of his wealth, or even of his exiſtence; he would readily make a juſt eſtimate of the difference between civil ſociety and ſavage anarchy. His concluſion would be that the advantages of ſecurity and protection, reſulting from good government, are an ample compenſation for the expences of individuals, in contributing to its ſupport. The ſame conſiderations, when applied to religious eſtabliſhments, will lead to a ſimilar concluſion. If a diſſenter from any national church, reflected on the difference between living among men, who have a general knowledge of the chriſtian religion, and whoſe morals are influenced by its precepts, and paſſing his life among ſuch as are deſtitute of all religion, and ignorant of chriſtian morality, he would immediately pronounce the

Digitized by Google

benefits reſulting to each member of the community, from the general diſſemination of the doctrines and precepts of chriſtianity, to be more than an equivalent for the trifling ſum that he contributes to the ſupport of the eſtabliſhment. If he conſidered how much more eligible a Calviniſt, a Quaker, or a Catholic, muſt find it to live among Chriſtian Proteſtants, whoſe morals are influenced by the doctrines of the goſpel, than among men who are deſtitute of religion, conſcience, and morality; or how much more agreeable it muſt be to a Proteſtant to live among Chriſtian Catholics, who agree with him in the belief of the ſame general, eſſential, and fundamental doctrines, and the ſame obligatory precepts of chriſtianity, who have the ſame moral ideas as himſelf, make the ſame diſtinction between virtue and vice, and expect the ſame remuneration of their deeds, than among men who are totally unacquainted with theſe things, and whoſe inclinations are the only rule of their actions, he would view the difference of ſituation in the ſame light as a perſon who inveſtigates the principles and conſiders the effects of civil legiſlature, ſees the difference between a well regulated community and a hord of barbarians, ignorant of moral order, and under no legal reſtraint. If a perſon reſide in Turkey, it is

Digitized by Google

undoubtedly more to his intereſt, that the Mahometan eſtabliſhment ſhould be ſupported, than that no religion whatever ſhould exiſt among the people. Mahometaniſm itſelf, however erroneous its creed may be in other reſpects, inculcates this important truth, the exiſtence of a future ſtate, where every individual of mankind muſt appear before the bar of the eternal Judge, and receive the juſt remuneration of his deeds, the reward of his virtues, or the puniſhment of his crimes; a doctrine, which has ſo powerful a tendency to controul impetuous paſſions, to check inordinate deſires, and to promote the peace of ſociety, that every individual is intereſted in its general propagation, among thoſe with whom he is obliged to aſſociate, even although it may accidentally be connected with other tenets to which he cannot give his approbation. It muſt however, be underſtood, that through the whole of this view, and the reflections with which it is accompanied, liberty of conſcience is ſuppoſed as the indiſputable right of every individual; for it would certainly be more deſirable to live among the moſt uncivilized Pagans, than among perſecuting chriſtians.

In public, the wicked are deterred from the commiſſion of crimes, by knowing themſelves

Digitized by Google

expoſed to the conſequences; but no human laws, nor any human power can reſtrain the robber or the aſſaſſin, when privacy promiſes him ſecurity from puniſhment. In ſuch caſes, nothing but the influence of religion, exhibiting in contraſt, the allurements and the terrors of a future ſtate, and the inexorable juſtice of the Supreme Ruler of the univerſe, who will not ſuffer either virtue to be unrewarded, or vice to remain unpuniſhed, can operate as a check to human depravity. The general inculcation of doctrines, ſo eminently conducive to the peace of ſociety, and the ſecurity of all its members, is therefore unqueſtionably the intereſt of every individual. For this reaſon, it appears, that if a national church be the moſt effectual means of propagating the general doctrines and obligatory precepts of chriſtianity, it becomes both a public and a private concern, and that in conſideration of the benefits derived from its influence on national morals, no individual ought to think it a grievance to contribute to its ſupport, although he may not, perhaps, give his aſſent to ſome of its particular doctrines.

No arrogant claim is here made to the right of deciding on the merits of different ſects, and

Digitized by Google

denominations of chriſtians. The taſk of tracing the intricate maze of religious controverſy, and of determining what ought to be the eſtabliſhed religion, in any of the countries of Europe, is left to the deciſion of theologians, who are better qualified for theſe diſcuſſions. It ſeems, however, that the judicious, choice, and proper organization of theſe eſtabliſhments depend, in no ſmall degree, on the particular circumſtances of nations. The general and fundamental truths of chriſtianity, are, in their nature, invariable; ſubordinate doctrines, and ceremonial obſervances, are to be conſidered only as appendages to religion, and therefore they have, at different periods, and in different countries, undergone a variety of changes and reforms. Every church that teaches the love of God, and the love of man, muſt have a beneficial effect on ſociety, and on this conſideration it appears eligible, that in every country, ſome national ſyſtem of religion ſhould be eſtabliſhed, as it ſeems to be the moſt effectual means of ſtrengthening, and rendering general, the influence of chriſtianity, by diſſeminating among the unthinking multitude the knowledge of its eſſential doctrines and moral precepts.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY V.

ON UNIVERSAL LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

OF all the phœnomena of the moral world, of all the eccentricities of the human mind, of all the abſurdities which diſgrace the hiſtory of the ſpecies, none has been more unreaſonable in its nature, or more calamitous in its effects, than that infernal ſpirit of religious perſecution, which has ſo often deluged the earth with blood, and rendered this globe more like an habitation of devils than of men. If this monſter be traced to its origin, it will, perhaps, be found to proceed from two diſtinct, and in ſome reſpects, oppoſite principles, a bigotted zeal for ſome particular doctrine or ſyſtem of religion, and the deſire of authority, influence, and power; the firſt has generally the greateſt influence on the minds of the ignorant and ſuperſtitious; but there is every reaſon to believe that the latter, principally actuates thoſe whoſe ſituation affords them the greateſt power and opportunity of exerciſing this religious tyranny. In ſome caſes it is difficult

Digitized by Google

to aſcertain which of the two has the predominancy, ſo intimately are they united and intermixed. When a particular train of ideas is once fixed in the mind, thoſe ideas continue to influence its operations, direct its reaſonings, and determine its concluſions, when the principles which at firſt gave riſe to ſuch mental combinations no longer exiſt; and thus prejudices remain when the cauſes which produced them are forgotten. Superſtition and bigotry, have too often been inſtilled into the minds of men, together with the pure and benevolent doctrines of religion, and formed a monſtrous combination, capable of producing the greateſt abſurdities, and the moſt enormous crimes. This mode of corrupting the mind, by converting pious zeal into intolerant bigotry, may ſometimes, perhaps, have proceeded from miſtake. It ſeems, however, to have more frequently been the effect of deſign. Whether thoſe who propoſe motives for the conduct of others, are themſelves actuated by the ſame principles, which they endeavour to inculcate, is often extremely problamatical. Sometimes it is very certain, that real and pretended motives of action are widely different. A fallacious picture is often exhibited by thoſe whoſe intereſt it is to rule the minds of men, in order to make their thoughts and actions

Digitized by Google

ſubſervient to their particular purpoſes. This was often the caſe in the times of perſecution: intereſt gave the firſt impulſe, ignorance and bigotry gave continuance to its force and activity. If Daniel's high ſtation, under King Darius, had not given umbrage to the Perſian courtiers, who were deſirous of the office which he filled, they would not have ſingled him out as an object of perſecution, neither would the three Jewiſh brethren have been repreſented to the King of Babylon as deſpiſers of the gods that he worſhipped, if the courtiers had not viewed with envious jealouſy the favours they received from that monarch. Religion had no concern in theſe matters, it was made the pretext in both theſe caſes, but intereſt was the *primum mobile* of the whole buſineſs.

If none had been intereſted in the ſupport of Paganiſm, the primitive chriſtians would not have ſo ſeverely ſuffered under Pagan perſecution, nor would the different ſects of chriſtians have perſecuted one another with ſuch rancorous malevolence, if intereſt had not given the impulſe to intolerant zeal. If emoluments, as well as doctrines, had not been thought in danger, the flame would have burned with leſs violence, and have been ſooner extinguiſhed, or rather it would, perhaps, never have been

Digitized by Google

kindled. Liberty of conſcience, in regard to the intercourſe between man and his Maker, is a right ſo perfectly natural and inalienable, that its extinction could never have been meditated, had not intereſt firſt formed the project, and committed the execution to ignorance and ſuperſtition.

It is perfectly congenial to human nature, that men, who are in poſſeſſion of any advantages, ſhould be unwilling to loſe them; and they will naturally and unavoidably be alarmed at the proſpect of ſuch an event. It may, therefore, eaſily be ſuppoſed, that in times of religious commotion, when the ſpirit of intolerance began to manifeſt itſelf in acts of violence and oppreſſion, thoſe who ſtood high in the eccleſiaſtical hierarchy, and whoſe perſons and offices were held ſacred, and commanded the veneration of mankind, would be alarmed at every innovation, every plan of reform, and every new doctrine which ſeemed to militate againſt a ſyſtem, that ſecured to them thoſe emoluments and advantages. It is neceſſary to the honour, perhaps to the exiſtence of religion, that ſuch proviſion ſhould be made for its miniſters, as may be ſufficient to maintain their reſpectability, and ſupport the dignity of their

Digitized by Google

ſtation and character; and if this has, ſometimes, too ſtrongly warped their affections towards temporal things, we muſt regard it as the conſequence of that mixture of good and evil, exiſting in every thing here below. If the miniſters of the altar had not poſſeſſed great temporal honours and advantages, of which they feared the annihilation, it is probable that John Huſs would not have been condemned to the flames, at Conſtance, nor Michael Servetus have ſuffered the ſame puniſhment, at Geneva.

Among the ignorant multitude, whoſe ideas are confined by ſyſtems, and whoſe minds are narrowed by the tenets of a particular ſect, a great number of perſons are often found, who imbibe a ſpirit of intolerance and perſecution, without having the leaſt proſpect of any temporal advantage from the prevalence of any particular opinion, or the predominancy of any particular religion. In thoſe perſons this intolerant ſpirit originates from ignorance, miſinformation, and prejudice; and ſuch are the moſt proper inſtruments for the uſe of thoſe who are perſecutors from more intereſted and concealed motives. To this obſervation, political affairs furniſh another perfectly ſimilar, a caſe exactly parallel. A number of perſons

Digitized by Google

attach themſelves to the intereſts of a party, without being acquainted with the motives or views of its leaders, and profoundly ignorant of their real deſigns, are hurried away by impoſing miſrepreſentations, florid harangues, fallacious reaſonings, and flattering promiſes, to every extravagance, and every enormity.

In the religious, or rather irreligious wars, which, to the diſgrace of humanity, ſo long and repeatedly deſolated Europe, none were more active than thoſe who were quite indifferent in regard to religion, but made uſe of its name in order to gain adherents among the zealots of the contending parties. The civil, or as they are commonly called the religious wars of France, exhibit numberleſs and ſtriking inſtances of the proſtitution of religion to the purpoſes of ambition, treaſonable diſaffection, or court intrigue. The factious nobles attached themſelves to the Catholic or the Proteſtant party, as it beſt ſuited their intereſts, in order to procure the ſupport of the bigotted profeſſors of each religion, who too ſeldom perceived themſelves to be no more than tools in the hand of faction, made uſe of to anſwer a temporary purpoſe, and then thrown aſide as uſeleſs. Had the bigots, both of the Catholic and the Proteſtant religions, poſſeſſed

Digitized by Google

good ſenſe enough to ſee that they were no more than atomatons, moved by political intrigue, and factious cabal, they would not ſo often have watered almoſt every province of the kingdom with their blood, for the intereſts of ſeditious and irreligious demagogues, rather than for thoſe of either religion. The more attentively we peruſe the hiſtory of mankind, and the more accurately we examine the ſcenes of human life, the more clearly we ſhall perceive, that both in political and religious commotions, the ignorant, the ſuperſtitious, and unthinking, are uſed as tools in performing the work of thoſe whoſe deſigns are deeper laid, and whoſe views are more extenſive.

Besides that ſanguinary malevolence, which is commonly denominated perſecution, there is alſo another kind of intolerant ſpirit, which, although it does not proceed to acts of violence againſt thoſe of a different perſuaſion, is nevertheleſs productive of a ſort of diſlike and contempt, ſtrongly tending to extinguiſh that univerſal love of all mankind which ought to characterize the profeſſors of chriſtianity. This ſort of intolerant zeal may be obſerved in numbers of otherwiſe well-meaning perſons.

Digitized by Google

Nothing is more common than to hear men of a religious turn of mind, ridiculing and condemning the doctrines of other ſects, and reprobating thoſe who profeſs them, as if their own were the ſyſtem of unerring truth, and its profeſſors infallible.

This kind of ſelf-ſufficiency in opinion, ſeems to originate in a principle of pride, deeply rooted in human nature, which has a powerful and extenſive influence, and againſt which every profeſſor of religion, of every denomination, ought carefully to guard his mind. From this pride, in a great meaſure, ariſes the ſatisfaction which men generally take in ſeeing others approve of their opinions. If we make accurate obſervations on the diſpoſitions of mankind, if we confine theſe obſervations to ever ſo contracted, or extend them to ever ſo enlarged a ſphere, we ſhall almoſt invariably perceive that men take a pleaſure in ſeeing others adopt their opinions in matters of importance, and particularly in thoſe of religion. This coincidence they conſider as a compliment to their underſtanding, and a decided approbation of their judgment; difference of opinion, on the contrary, ſeems to imply a tacit impeachment of their abilities, and inſpires a mixed

Digitized by Google

ſentiment of contempt and diſguſt. From ſuch ſentiments, the tranſition to perſecution is eaſy, eſpecially when enthuſiaſm, perverting the guidance of conſcience, prevails on it to give a ſanction to intolerance.

It is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that every one thinks his own religion the beſt, and that his own creed appears, to his view, the moſt rational. This, however, cannot authoriſe him to expect or require that others ſhould adopt the ſame opinions. Whatever conviction he may feel in his own mind on the ſubject, he ought to conſider that others may have as clear a knowledge of divine things as himſelf. The man who preſumes to ſay, the religion that I profeſs is the only true faith, and, conſequently, all others are erroneous, ſays the ſame thing in effect, as if he expreſſed himſelf more explicitly thus, "I am the only wiſe man; all other men are fools except thoſe who hold the ſame opinions with me, and they are wiſe becauſe their judgment coincides with mine." Few of thoſe, perhaps, whoſe bigotry to a particular ſyſtem has inſpired them with intolerant principles, have ſo accurately inveſtigated the operations of their own mind, and ſo minutely

Digitized by Google

analized their own ſentiments, as to perceive the full force and influence of this ſelf-ſufficient pride of human nature. Whether its operation be diſcovered or not, it certainly exiſts, and has generally had ſome ſhare in ſtirring up the ſpirit of perſecution.

It is worthy of obſervation, that the Great Author of our religion does not condemn, with ſeverity, the errors of the Jews, when they were no more than miſconceptions, originating in a miſtake of the judgment and not in a perverſeneſs of the will. It was only when they led to criminality of conduct, that thoſe errors became the ſubjects of his animadverſion. The Eſſenes, were a ſect among the Jews, whoſe opinions differed in ſeveral reſpects from the original doctrines of the Moſaical law. They had ſuperadded a number of opinions and practices not enjoined by that inſtitution; but their lives were ſimple, and their manners inoffenſive; and we never find them condemned by the Divine Inſtructer of men. Even the Sadduces, whoſe religious opinions were the moſt abhorrent from the doctrines which he came to inculcate, as they neither believed the reſurrection of the dead, nor the exiſtence of any future ſtate, but ſtrictly adhering to the letter of the law, limited all their

Digitized by Google

expectation of rewards and punishments to the present life, do not appear to have been condemned by him on that account. He made use of every opportunity to rectify their mistakes; and on their inquiring whose wife the woman should be after the resurrection, who had been successively married to seven husbands, he meekly tells them that, "in the resurrection, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels." He corrects their errors, but he corrects them without any acrimony or reproach. On the contrary, he denounces on every occasion, a woe against the Scribes and Pharisees. These, however, were the most orthodox teachers of the Jewish religion; and he himself gives a sanction to their preaching, in saying, "the Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, whatever, therefore, they bid you observe, that observe and do." They had superadded a number of minutiæ to to the law of Moses, and pretended to preach and practice its doctrines and precepts with the most rigorous punctuality. Christ does not impeach their orthodoxy, but he most decidedly reprobates their conduct, which was in the highest degree hypocritical and immoral. They imagined, by their scrupulous adherence to the law, with the addition of a multiplicity of supernumerary duties to counterbalance their pride,

Digitized by Google

their avarice, and extortion. This was what the Redeemer of mankind reprobated on every occaſion, and in the ſtrongeſt terms. He does not condemn their punctitious formalities, or their traditional doctrines, as ſpeculative theories, but as they ſerved for a cloke to their vices. He does not denounce a woe againſt them becauſe they held this or that ſpeculative opinion, but "Woe, ſays he, unto you Scribes and Phariſees, hypocrites, becauſe you ſay and do not." Opinions conſidered merely as abſtract theories exiſting in the mind, he ſeems to have looked on with indifference, but denounces the vengeance of his heavenly father againſt injuſtice, oppreſſion, and every kind of vice and immorality, furniſhing to his followers a leſſon which all ought to imitate. All indeed ought not only to abſtain from vice themſelves, but alſo on every occaſion, and in every circumſtance of life, to diſcountenance it in others. But fallible and imperfect man, can claim no right of calling others to account for their modes of thinking in religious matters. Theſe are things that can not come under the cognizance of human authority. They relate entirely to the communication between the ſoul of man and his Creator, and of which the diſcuſſion can only appertain to the ſupreme tribunal of the eternal

Digitized by Google

Judge, where every error that is not the effect of evil intention, criminal neglect, or wilful ignorance, will unqueſtionably meet with indulgence and pardon.

Let human arrogance caſt a look to the vaulted firmament: let preſumptuous man view thoſe myriads of ſtars, the central and eradicating ſuns of innumerable ſyſtems. To the powers of the eye, let him add thoſe of the teleſcope, and view worlds beyond worlds revolving in the unmeaſurable regions of æther. The vaſt aſſemblage which our moſt improved inſtruments enable us to diſcover, in all probability, conſtitutes no more than a point in the immunity of the creation. Let the mind, recoiling from a view, which overpowers its faculties, and extends beyond all the limits that imagination can fix, deſcend to this globe, which we inhabit, this minute atom floating amidſt myriads of worlds: then let calm judgment pronounce whether the inhabitants of this grain of ſand ought to boaſt of having diſcovered the only acceptable mode of worſhipping the Creator of this ſtupendous fabric. If a being of a ſuperior nature ſhould look down upon man, and view his ſituation, his powers, and all the circumſtances of his exiſtence, he would ſee that his dwelling

Digitized by Google

is a point in infinite ſpace, and his life only a moment in the circle of eternity: he would perceive that the ſucceſſive generations of men paſs away like fleeting ſhadows, and are loſt like vapours diſperſed in the air. What then would ſuch an obſerver think of the preſumption of a few of thoſe grovelling beings, who, although frail and fallible, like others of their fellow-creatures, and liable to all the weakneſſes of the reſt of the ſpecies, take upon themſelves to announce to the preſent and all future generations that mankind muſt, throughout eternity, be the victims of divine vengeance, if they deviate one tittle from the theories which they have formed, or the creeds they have compoſed, to ſerve as ſtandards, by which all men, in all ages, ought to regulate their opinions? Shall finite and fallible man thus preſume to place himſelf in the judgment ſeat of the Sovereign of the Univerſe, ſnatch from his hand the balance of juſtice, and arrogantly pronounce ſentence againſt his fellow men, becauſe their notions and his do not exactly correſpond.

Nothing but a narrowneſs of intellect and contracted ideas could ever induce a perſon to condemn his fellow mortals, and to conſider them as objects of divine wrath, merely becauſe their

Digitized by Google

ſpeculative opinions do not coincide with his own. If thoſe preſumptuous judges would learn to extend their views beyond the confined circle in which they move, take a wider ſurvey of the moral world, and conſider the different nations of mankind, whoſe ideas are modified by a variety of accidental cauſes, as one vaſt family, children of one common father, teſtifying their filial obedience by ſuch various kinds of homage as they imagine to be the moſt acceptable to him, they might acquire that expanſion of mind which would open the heart to univerſal benevolence, the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of genuine chriſtianity.

THERE is not, perhaps, any circumſtance that reflects greater luſtre on the national church of this country, than her tolerating ſpirit, and univerſal chriſtian charity. In many inſtances, the church of England has ſhown herſelf actuated by liberal principles, and the moſt extenſive benevolence; but perhaps in none more than in her generous protection of the perſecuted and exiled clergy of France. Laying aſide all narrow and illiberal prejudices, the clergy, nobility, gentry, and every claſs of enlightened Proteſtants, received as chriſtian brethren, the

Digitized by Google

oppreſſed and perſecuted clergy of a hoſtile country and a different communion, exhibiting an inſtance of liberal-minded benevolence, unparalleled ſince the firſt eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity, at once evincing their enlightened notions, and ſetting before the eyes of all the world an example which cannot fail of operating on the minds of thinking men, in countries where the anti-chriſtian ſpirit of intolerance yet exiſts. The ſway of that infernal demon, is now, however, much weakened: there is indeed every reaſon to hope that it will, in a ſhort time, be entirely annihilated, and that the term religious perſecution will no longer be met with, except in the enſanguined pages of hiſtory, the diſgraceful records of fanaticiſm and ignorance.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VI.

ON ECCLESIASTICAL EMOLUMENTS.

THERE are few ſubjects of diſcourſe more frequently brought forward than the propriety of the great revenues annexed to the church in this and moſt other countries of Europe, and few, perhaps, of which the diſcuſſion is farther beyond the reach of popular information. Nothing is more common than to give, without any examination, a decided opinion on a matter of ſo great importance in the ſyſtem of civilized Europe, and the meaneſt peaſant or journeyman mechanic pretends to determine the point as readily as the experienced civilian, who, from youth to age, has employed himſelf in ſtudying the regulations of ſociety, and the origin and rights of property. Theſe claſſes of people ſeldom fail to expreſs, in the moſt unequivocal language, their entire diſapprobation of the wealth of the clergy, and conſider the revenues of the church as an abuſe of religion, or a ſpecies of monopoly. This has long been the

Digitized by Google

language of numbers of the lower orders of the community; and wherever the revolutionizing principle, which of late has been ſo prevalent on the continent, has had an opportunity of producing its effects, the conſequences of this opinion have been too conſpicuous to eſcape the attention of any philoſophical obſerver of thoſe ſcenes, which, during the laſt fifteen years, have rapidly paſſed in review on the great theatre of Europe. As it is evident that the ſubverſion of all eſtabliſhed ſyſtems of religion, and the ſequeſtration of eccleſiaſtical property have invariably conſtituted a part of the revolutionary plan, as it is equally evident that the overthrow of the religious eſtabliſhment, has, among modern revolutioniſts, been uniformly contemplated in connexion with the ſubverſion of civil government, and as many have been diſpoſed to view, with an unfavourable eye, the emoluments of the clergy, without underſtanding either the nature of the ſubject, or the tendency of the principle; on this threefold conſideration, the rights and emoluments of the church, and the tenure by which they are held, merit an impartial inveſtigation.

In the revolutionary theory, it appears to be an eſtabliſhed maxim, that the revenues of the

Digitized by Google

church are public property, and revokable at pleaſure. For this doctrine, however, it appears difficult to diſcover, in the civil conſtitutions of Europe, any juſt or legal grounds, or any principle that can eſtabliſh its validity in the eye of unprejudiced enquiry; and if it be examined by the invariable rules of moral juſtice, the difficulty of finding any thing that can give it a ſanction, will not be eaſily ſurmounted. However the matter may appear in a ſuperficial view, it will, upon mature conſideration, be ſeen in a different light. In examining the nature of eccleſiaſtical tenure, it will, in order to exhibit a juſt ſtatement of the caſe, be found requiſite to take a retroſpective view of the origin, the diviſion, and transfer of property, as determined by the courſe of events, and the regulations of civil ſociety. All that men poſſeſs is originally the gift of the Creator of the univerſe, who has profuſely ſpread abroad the abundance of this terraqueous globe as the common property of all the human race, and left to the exertions and arbitration of man the diviſion and appropriation of the particular ſhares of the general ſtock: Every one, therefore, has ſeized what he was able in the univerſal ſcramble. It was not, however, in the nature of things, that all ſhould be equally ſucceſsful in the great conteſt

Digitized by Google

for power and property, which has continued through ſo many ages, and will only end with the termination of human exiſtence. The difference of opportunity, abilities, and exertion, has cauſed the difference that we ſee in the fortunes both of nations and individuals, and the ſame cauſes will for ever operate in the ſame manner, and produce the ſame effect. If an equal diviſion of property were made at this day throughout the globe, the ſame inequality that we now ſee would immediately begin to take place, and in leſs than a century, another generation would witneſs the ſame diſtinctions and the ſame difference of conditions that the world at preſent diſplays.

If thoſe who firſt took the pains to cultivate the earth were yet in exiſtence, the propriety of the ſoil would, by the law of nature, and juſtice, be theirs; or if their lineal deſcendants could be traced, it would, by the laws of inheritance, eſtabliſhed in ſociety, belong to them, or to thoſe to whom they had by ſome mode of transfer alienated their right. But the ſucceſſive revolutions which have happened in every country, where any diviſion and appropriation of property have ever taken place, have long ago annulled all ſuch claims by the extirpation or ſpoliation of the ancient

Digitized by Google

poſſeſſors. There is not now a ſingle acre of land in the poſſeſſion of the lineal deſcendants of its firſt cultivators and poſſeſſors, nor a ſingle country under the government of its ancient rulers. In ſome countries, revolutions have been frequent, and wealth and power often transferred; and indeed in all thoſe that are civilized this change has repeatedly taken place. Excepting the Arabs of the deſert, the Tartar tribes, and other wandering or ſavage hords, among whom no permanent diviſion or appropriation of the land has ever been made, the hiſtory of every nation exhibits inſtances of its ſubjugation, and of the tranſlation of its power, and wealth, to other hands. Among the ancients, private property was not, as at preſent, reſpected in war: armed colonies frequently left their ancient ſeats, went in queſt of new ſettlements, and made war on a principle of rapine and extermination.

With the revolutions which have taken place in Europe, we are tolerably well acquainted. The Romans ſubjugated the ſouthern parts; and the northern tribes impelling one another forward, exterminated a part, and diſpoſſeſſed the reſt of the ancient proprietors. Hiſtory ſcarcely records any thing elſe than a

Digitized by Google

ſeries of continual changes, and a ſucceſſion of new maſters, who acquired their poſſeſſions by conqueſt, and their riches by ſpoil. One of the moſt celebrated writers of the laſt century remarks, that not a ſingle family in Rome can trace its genealogy from the old Romans. The preſent great families of Italy, are of Gothic extraction: the greateſt part of the poſterity of the conquerors of the world are ſunk into the maſs of the Italian peaſantry, and ſome of the lineal deſcendants of the Cæſars are probably among the ſtrolling picture-ſellers whom we ſee diſperſed throughout every country of Europe.

In the ages of migration and conqueſt, which terminated the exiſtence of the Roman empire, the conquering chiefs divided the lands among their followers, according to their rank, their merit, and the ſervices they had rendered. At the ſame time, or ſoon after, revenues were annexed to the church, or thoſe which it already poſſeſſed under the Roman empire, were ſecured to it by the conquerors. Theſe diviſions, confirmed by divers regulations, conſtitute the baſis of all territorial rights, both public and private, although a variety of changes have ſucceſſively taken place.

Digitized by Google

In the diviſion of property, the conquerors of countries had the ſame right to diſtribute a part to eccleſiaſtical as to military perſons, and the former hold their poſſeſſions by the ſame tenure. Voltaire, with his uſual vivacity of expreſſion, demands what right the church could claim to one-tenth of his eſtate at Fernay, and whether the Supreme Being ever ſigned a deed of conveyance to that effect. To this reaſoning of the French philoſopher, how acute ſoever it may ſeem, the anſwer is obvious. The Supreme Being has not, except in the ordinary courſe of his providence, made any diviſion of property, nor appropriated by any ſpecial ordinance any ſhare either to nations, communities, or individuals; but the ſame civil power, and the ſame legal diſtribution, aſſigned the tenth part of that eſtate to the church, which gave to Voltaire the other nine: the rights were conſequently in nature and origin the ſame, and the injuſtice of diſpoſſeſſing either party would certainly have been equal.

Divine Providence has ordained, and the ſtructure of ſociety requires that ſome individuals, as well as ſome nations, ſhould poſſeſs a greater ſhare of wealth and power than others; and the

Digitized by Google

neceſſary connexions and mutual dependencies of ſocial intercourſe are ſtrengthened by this inequality, the unavoidable conſequence of the perpetual ſcramble of ſo many myriads of competitors. If pre-eminence, however, can be the lot of only a few; it is, in a political and moral point of view, of little importance to ſociety, whether property be in the hands of an eccleſiaſtical or a lay proprietor. To the public, the effects are preciſely the ſame. The lands of a Biſhop are cultivated in the ſame manner as thoſe of a nobleman; they furniſh the ſame employment to the induſtrious huſbandman, their produce is brought to the market, and helps to feed the people.

If an eſtate lie in my neighbourhood, to which I cannot claim any right, and conſequently of which I cannot in conſequence expect, and ought not to covet the poſſeſſion, it is difficult to conceive how it ſhould be any thing more than a matter of indifference to me, whether it belong to the clergyman of the pariſh, or to the Lord of the Manor, to the Biſhop of the dioceſe, or to a lay Baron. So long as I have no right to the poſſeſſion, how can I invalidate that of the poſſeſſor?

Digitized by Google

Besides the grants made to the church, by thoſe in whom was veſted the diſpoſal of lands, in the infancy of the political ſyſtems of Europe, and of which the validity cannot on any principles of juriſprudence be called in queſtion, many annexations to its revenues were the bequeſts of individuals; and teſtamentary donations have in all ages, and in every civilized ſociety, been accounted inviolable, and ſuppoſed to confer a legal right of the moſt unqueſtionable nature. Thoſe bequeſts, it muſt be allowed, were too often dictated by ſuperſtition as a compenſation for crimes, and, therefore, were judiciouſly placed under proper reſtrictions by the mortmain act, which deprived the ſinner of the fallacious hope, of indulging through life, his propenſity to vice, and then bribing heaven in his laſt moments at the expence of his ſucceſſors. Such a reſtriction was exceedingly well adapted to the times; but it did not invalidate the teſtamentary donations made prior to the act, nor ſuch as did not come under its operation; and it has no influence on any of the eccleſiaſtical revenues of the preſent day.

It ſeems, therefore, that as the diviſion and appropriation of property originate from the

Digitized by Google

various ſucceſs of the efforts of mankind for its acquiſition, depend on a multiplicity of adventitious circumſtances, and are ſanctioned by the regulations of civil ſociety, the poſſeſſions of the church being granted by the ſame authority, held by the ſame tenure, and guaranteed on the ſame principles of moral and political juſtice as every other kind of property, the clergy have the ſame right to their revenues as lay proprietors to their lands and hereditaments, and that the ſeizure of the church lands muſt be as unjuſtifiable as the confiſcation of thoſe of any other innocent members of the community.

As the revenues of the church are not attached to individuals, but to the hierarchy, the criminality even of its members could not juſtify their alienation. In juſtice, the individuals alone could be obnoxious to the laws, but the community and its property ought always to remain inviolate.

Eccleſiastical hiſtory, it muſt be allowed, affords ſeveral inſtances of the ſeizure of the revenues of the church in different countries; but thoſe arbitrary proceedings are ſomewhat difficult to juſtify by any ſolid reaſoning or on any principles of equity, which we ſhould think

Digitized by Google

it ſafe to apply to any other caſes of poſſeſſion. The ſyſtem adopted in ſome countries of ſeizing the lands of the church, and fixing the eccleſiaſtical ſtipends in money, is ruinous to the intereſts of the chriſtian clergy, and tends to the degradation of the clerical character by cauſing the miniſters of the altar to be conſidered as a ſort of ſervants of the public. It alſo renders the church more burdenſome to the lower orders of the people, of whom, every individual, in proportion to his conſumption, furniſhes his contribution to the national treaſury, out of which, thoſe ſalaries muſt be paid, than it is found where lands are aſſigned for the clergy, and where it is conſequently productive of no greater inconvenience to the people at large that an eſtate is in the hands of a Biſhop or an Archbiſhop, than if it were in the hands of a Marquis or a Duke. The converſion of eccleſiaſtical revenues, into pecuniary ſtipends, is alſo in other reſpects pregnant with certain bad conſequences, of which, although it be impoſſible to calculate the full extent, we may, from preceding circumſtances, form a probable conjecture. No one is ignorant of the prodigious influx of money, and the conſequent diminution of its value, which has, within the laſt three centuries, taken place. This is a circum-

Digitized by Google

ſtance which has had a fatal operation on a number of public inſtitutions, to the ſupport of which, a fixed ſtipend in money had been aſſigned. This is verified in every part of Europe, and particularly in Great Britain, where a number of charitable inſtitutions, which were once of great importance and benefit to the public, are now dwindled down into inſignificancy, and ſome of them conſidered ſo little worth attention as to be entirely loſt, or converted to purpoſes totally different from thoſe for which they were firſt intended. This obſervation is no where more frequently verified than in endowed ſchools. To many of theſe in country pariſhes, ſtipends in money of ten or twelve pounds per annum, have by ſome benevolent perſons been annexed, which, through the unfortunate miſtake of fixing the donation in money, of which the value is continually diminiſhing, inſtead of land, which will ever maintain its relative value, have become of little uſe or conſideration. The ſalaries above mentioned, of which ſome were annexed to thoſe inſtitutions two or three centuries ago, were at that period ſufficient for the maintenance of a perſon of learning and virtue, to ſuperintend the education of youth, but are by reaſon of the diminiſhed value of money, in conſequence of the influx of wealth,

Digitized by Google

by the diſcovery of the American mines, and the extenſion of commerce, now become ſo inconſiderable as not to be worth the attention of any perſon of real merit. Such would have been the caſe with eccleſiaſtical revenues, had they been originally fixed in pecuniary ſtipends inſtead of landed property. If we carefully inveſtigate the hiſtory of chriſtianity, in connexion with the circumſtances of paſt and preſent times, it will lead us to an obſervation, which every one, perhaps, has not made, and ſtrongly induce us to think, that if the church eſtabliſhment had not been put on a reſpectable footing, by judiciouſly aſſigning a part of the landed property of each country for its ſupport, the chriſtian religion, degraded and rendered contemptible by the abject ſituation of its miniſters, would, before this day, have either been totally extinguiſhed, or have degenerated into a maſs of ſuperſtitions and abſurdities, which would have reduced it nearly to the level of Paganiſm. It is impoſſible to foreſee the future circumſtances of the chriſtian church, and the effects of the enterpriſing and commercial ſpirit of the European world, or how far theſe may be counteracted by the riſing greatneſs of America, and to calculate the relative value of money in ages to come, liable as it is, to be

Digitized by Google

encreaſed or diminiſhed by various unforeſeen events: this, however, may be, with ſafety affirmed, that if the ſame cauſes continue to operate to the ſame extent, the conſequence muſt be, that the clergy of thoſe countries where the church lands have been ſequeſtered, and ſalaries in money ſubſtituted as a compenſation, muſt, in the courſe of a century, be reduced almoſt to mendicity. This will compel them, at ſucceſſive periods, to petition the ſtate for an augmentation, which will probably be ſometimes granted with reluctance, and always with parſimony, and by tending to encreaſe the public expenditure, and render the taxes more burdenſome, will conſtantly excite popular diſcontent, and cauſe religion to be conſidered as a grievance.

Among the multitude, it is common to adopt opinions without examination, and without reflecting on the conſequences to which they lead; and many are not aware that the idea of depriving the church of its revenues, involves a revolutionary principle of the moſt ruinous and anarchical tendency. The ſame civil organization that guarantees the poſſeſſions of the prelate and the nobleman, ſecures the pariſh glebe to the vicar, and to the loweſt democratical

Digitized by Google

freeholder the poſſeſſion of his ſingle acre. If the rights of one order of the community can be violated, or its property invaded, what ſecurity againſt a ſimilar infringement can be claimed or expected by others?

In a free country, and under a well organized conſtitution, every man enjoys privileges, which, through contracted information and want of attention, he is often incapable of appreciating, and of which he might be as readily deprived as the greateſt ſpiritual or temporal proprietor might be of his eccleſiaſtical or ſecular emoluments. It is the ſame ſyſtem of civil legiſlature, accommodated to the general and the particular intereſts of the community, ſuited to all its gradations and extended to all its ramifications, which has attached to the higher orders their property, that ſecures to the farmer and the tradeſman the accumulations of their induſtry, and to the day-labourer the poſſeſſion and enjoyment of his wages, the fruit of his toil. In ſociety all ſecurity reſts on the ſame baſis, and originates from the ſame ſource. Every thing that tends to deſtroy the equilibrium of rank and ſubordination, and to violate the ſacred right of property, is conſequently pregnant with diſorder and productive of anarchy.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VII.

ON THE CAUSE OF THE DIVERSITY OF RELIGIOUS OPINIONS, AND THE INDUCEMENT IT AFFORDS TO MUTUAL TOLERATION AND UNIVERSAL CHARITY.

THE difference of religious opinions among men, is a neceſſary effect produced by the operation of cauſes entirely adventitious. The orthodoxy of our belief depends on a thouſand circumſtances, of which the diſpoſal has never been in our own power. The ſame perſon who, in Denmark or Sweden, is a Lutheran, would, if he had been educated in Spain, Portugal, or Italy, have been a Roman Catholic; in Ruſſia, a member of the Greek church, &c. If we conſider how powerfully, and in ſome caſes, how irreſiſtibly external circumſtances operate on the human mind, we ſhall not be aſtoniſhed at the diverſity of religious opinions, nor pride ourſelves on any ſuppoſed ſuperiority of our own. Different perſons are ſo differently circumſtanced, that it is impoſſible they ſhould all have the ſame ideas, and form the ſame opinions on ſubjects of abſtract ſpeculation.

Digitized by Google

If a thouſand perſons, whoſe optics are all exactly alike, ſhould contemplate any landſcape in the ſame point of view, from the ſame ſtation, and through the ſame medium, they would all ſee the ſame objects, in the ſame proportion, and the ſame arrangement; and if their imagination and retentive faculties were perfectly ſimilar, they would form and retain in their minds the ſame picture. If, on the contrary, either the obſervers had different optics, or contemplated the ſame landſcape from different ſtations, they would neither diſcover all the ſame objects nor the ſame diſpoſition. Many of the objects that would preſent themſelves clearly and diſtinctly to ſome of them, would be quite concealed from the ſight of others; and to the different ſpectators, thoſe that were viſible would appear of different magnitudes, and placed in a different manner. The obſervers would conſequently form in their minds different pictures of the vaſt aſſemblage. It is not only reaſonable to ſuppoſe, but experimentally evident, that our views of ſpeculative things are perfectly analogous to our manner of ſeeing material objects, and that when conſidered in different lights, and contemplated in different points of view, the ſame aſſemblage preſents itſelf in a different manner to the mental as well as to the corporeal eye.

Digitized by Google

It appears to be an unqueſtionable fact, that nature, or to ſpeak more religiouſly, and even more rationally, the God of Nature, who has diſplayed an infinite variety in all his works, has modelled the intellectual world with the ſame diverſifying energy that he has ſo unequivocally manifeſted in the formation of the material ſyſtem. In the latter, we perceive the immenſe machine of the univerſe, divided into vaſt compartments, the earth covered with vegetation, and crowded with animal life. The whole aſſemblage of created things is infinitely diverſified. Animals and vegetables are divided into genus and ſpecies. The individuals of each ſpecies are formed with a ſtriking reſemblance; but at the ſame time are all conſpicuouſly different in their minute organization. It is indeed wonderful to contemplate the infinite variety diſplayed in every part of organized matter. No two trees, nor even two leaves of the ſame tree were ever ſeen exactly alike, nor two men whoſe faces exactly reſembled each other; and the ſame diverſity is obſervable throughout the whole creation. Reaſon and experience lead us to conclude, that as great a variety exiſts in the mental faculties as in the exterior formation of the human ſpecies, and that he

Digitized by Google

who gave to all men their intellectual powers, alone knows how far he has enabled them to inveſtigate the truth.

NOTWITHSTANDING the diverſity which unqueſtionably exiſts in the organization of human minds, the difference of human circumſtances appears to be far greater, far more conſpicuous, and to have a much more decided influence on the operations of the intellect. The variety which exiſts in the combinations of human circumſtances, extends as far as the ſphere of human exiſtence, and perhaps no two individuals were ever circumſtanced exactly alike. In the moral, as in the phyſical world, when theſe variations are trivial, their influence is proportionably ſmall, and ſcarcely perceptible; but where the difference is decided and ſtriking, its effects are diſtinguiſhable and important.

To exhibit a juſt repreſentation of the effects of moral circumſtances on human opinions, we need only bring forward to diſtinct inſpection, and trace to their original ſource the religious ideas of an Engliſhman, a Swede, an Italian, and a Muſcovite. Thoſe perſons educated in different countries, and under different religious eſtabliſhments, might, in this

Digitized by Google

reſpect, be compared to obſervers taking a view of the city of London, from the different ſtations of Blackheath, the Surry hills, Highgate, or the crown of Weſtminſter or Blackfriars Bridge. Each would have a grand proſpect of the city diſplayed before him; but to each it would appear very different. The collective group of objects would appear differently arranged, and many of thoſe which would be conſpicuous and ſhew themſelves to the greateſt advantage from one of the ſtations, would, in another, be totally concealed from the view. If theſe obſervers were perſpective or landſcape painters, their drawings would exhibit very different repreſentations of the Britiſh metropolis; and no one, whatever abilities he might poſſeſs, could be a competent judge of the reſpective merits of their performances, unleſs he contemplated the appearance of the city from the ſame ſtations. A perfect analogy appears to exiſt between the mental and the corporeal optics, and, therefore, we ought not to preſume to judge either of the underſtanding or the ſincerity of thoſe who differ from us in opinion, unleſs we could place ourſelves in the ſame ſituation, and contemplate the ſubjects of diſquiſition in the ſame point of view in which they have been accuſtomed to ſee them exhibited. This con-

Digitized by Google

ſideration might check our preſumptuous deciſions on the merits of our own cauſe, reſtrain our precipitancy in condemning, unheard, thoſe who exerciſe the right of thinking, as well as ourſelves, and confound that pride of the human mind which thinks its own concluſions infallible.

It is unreaſonable and unjuſt to eſteem it criminal in others, not to ſee things in the ſame light as we do, and to condemn them becauſe they do not perceive the full force of the arguments which convince our underſtanding, and determine the formation of our religious theories. Ought we not rather to regard them as travellers, ignorantly and innocently gone out of the way, and bewildered in a labyrinth, without having been fortunate enough to find the clue of extrication? Ought we not, with the moſt affectionate regard, to give them the beſt inſtructions we are able, and, in a friendly manner, ſubmit to their conſideration the reaſons that induce us to entertain opinions different from theirs. If our arguments do not operate ſo forcibly on their minds as on ours, let us acknowledge, at leaſt, the poſſibility that we may err as well as others. Let us remember, that infallibility is not an attribute of humanity. If our conviction of the truth of our own theory be

Digitized by Google

ſo ſtrong, as ſcarcely to permit us to ſuppoſe a poſſibility of miſtake, which is certainly the caſe with many good men of very different perſuaſions, let us conclude, that thoſe who cannot perceive the cogency of ſuch arguments as irreſiſtibly flaſh conviction on our minds, poſſeſs that degree of light and knowledge which infinite wiſdom in the boundleſs variety of its diſpenſation has thought fit to beſtow on them. This is religious zeal, tempered as it ought always to be by chriſtian charity, which is nothing leſs than univerſal benevolence.

It is too common to attribute what we call errors in religion to inſincerity, neglect of enquiry, or ſome other wilful fault in thoſe by whom they are entertained. This kind of preſumptuous deciſion proceeds from that ſpirit of ſelf-ſufficiency which arrogates to itſelf the right of judging others in open violation of the divine prerogative. It does not appear to have been the deſign of the Supreme Being, that all mankind ſhould be of the ſame opinion in religious matters any more than on other ſubjects of abſtract ſpeculation. If ſuch had been his will, it could not have failed of its accompliſhment. He could have formed the human mind with powers adequate to the inveſtigation of every ſubject,

Digitized by Google

and the diſcovery of every truth, and have ſo arranged human circumſtances, that men ſhould have ſeen the objects of intellectual perception in the ſame point of view. Infinite wiſdom has proportioned all our ſenſes to their objects in the manner the moſt perfectly adapted to our well-being, and could, with equal facility, have eſtabliſhed the ſame unerring proportion between our intellectual powers and the ſubjects of their inveſtigation. The Almighty, after beſtowing on us all the knowledge neceſſary to our comfort and happineſs, has left the inveſtigation of things more abſtruſe for the exerciſe of our mental faculties.

An important conſideration offers itſelf to the mind of every one who has the leaſt knowledge of mankind, either from reading or obſervation. Among chriſtians of every denomination, there are found a great number of men of the ſtrongeſt intellect, of conſummate abilities, profound erudition, and exemplary piety, whoſe exalted genius ſoars above the miſts of prejudice, whoſe diſintereſtedneſs exempts them from the imputation of diſguiſing their opinion, or making an hypocritical profeſſion from intereſted motives. Many of thoſe have employed their

Digitized by Google

time and their talents in the ſincereſt enquiries after religious truth, and yet, materially differ in their ſpeculative doctrines. Not a few of them have alſo given convincing proofs of their ſincerity, and of the force of their convictions by ſuffering the moſt cruel perſecutions, and, in ſome inſtances, death itſelf, for their adherence to opinions diametrically oppoſite to one another. It is evident, that ſome of them were miſtaken. When two perſons diſagree in opinion, on any ſubject whatever, although both may be wrong, it is certain that both cannot be right. There are, however, numbers of perſons who have all the abilities and means of inveſtigating truth, of which human nature is capable, and which human circumſtances ſeem to afford, and yet entertain opinions widely different in regard to doctrinal points. If plain and undeniable facts be admitted as grounds of reaſoning, it will, from theſe, appear evident that uniformity of human opinion is inconſiſtent with the nature of things here below, and that ſpeculative error being involuntary and unavoidable, is conſequently pardonable.

Differences in religious opinions become criminal when they are made uſe of for pernicious purpoſes. Scarcely any circum-

Digitized by Google

ſtance of the moral world exhibits a more diſguſting picture of the depravity of human nature, than the frequent proſtitution of religion to the very worſt of purpoſes. Hiſtory, both ancient and modern, however, ſhews that this has too often been the caſe. That it was frequently ſo among the Pagans is not a matter of wonder. A religion founded on principles, for the moſt part purely imaginary, inculcating into the minds of the populace no other worſhip than that of ideal divinities, in expectation of temporal rewards and extolling falſe heroiſm, and an extravagant thirſt after fame as the higheſt pitch of human virtue, was a fit engine of power and policy. The Jewiſh religion, although of divine original, was under the management of depraved and vicious men, converted to intereſted purpoſes, and made ſubſervient to temporal intereſts; and among chriſtians, freedom of religious opinion has too often been pleaded as a pretext for diſturbing ſocial order. Among the Jews, the prophets, falſe as well as true, made no ſcruple of ſanctioning, with the name of the God of Iſrael, the predictions they uttered to pleaſe a deſigning Prince, or a diſcontented people. As the Jews, before the captivity, had very obſcure notions of a future ſtate, and did not, in

Digitized by Google

general, appear to extend their hopes or fears beyond the limits of the preſent life, they might, perhaps, not fully diſcover the enormity of ſuch a procedure, eſpecially when they imagined it to be conducive to the national good, or their own political views. Among chriſtians, however, none can be ignorant of the criminality of proſtituting religion to intereſt, and making uſe of its name to ſanction ſedition and excite commotions. The goſpel diſpenſation is ſo clear, in regard to eſſentials, and points out ſo plainly the line of conduct, which every man ought to purſue, in order to be a good ſubject and a good member of ſociety, that none can err in that reſpect. The moral doctrines it inculcates are ſo intelligible to every capacity, that there are, in this reſpect, no diſſenters among chriſtians; all the differences that exiſt relate to ſpeculative opinions, and of theſe, every man has a right to form his own. The human mind, in regard to the formation and aſſociation of its ideas, although influenced by a number of external and adventitious circumſtances, is independent in the full extent of our conceptions of independence; man being accountable to none but God for his opinions, ſo long as they produce no actions detrimental to the intereſts and peace of ſociety. When religious opinions are uſed to excite commo-

Digitized by Google

tions, and ſubvert eſtabliſhed order, they degenerate from intellectual theories to active criminality, tend to deſtroy the benevolent influence of chriſtianity, and form volcanos of miſchief in the community pregnant with conſequences deſtructive to the happineſs of mankind.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY VIII.

ON EDUCATION.

EDUCATION is a term of an extenſive ſignification, involving ſubjects of the greateſt importance, and exciting conſiderations of the moſt intereſting nature. In one ſenſe it may, as Cicero obſerves, be ſaid to commence at the cradle and end only at the grave, and to compriſe the whole maſs of knowledge acquired through life by all the various means of information. In our common acceptation of the word, we do not, however, give to its meaning ſo great an extenſion, but generally uſe it to ſignify what is learnt during that period of youth which is peculiarly devoted to the acquiſition of knowledge, under the inſpection and inſtruction of maſters in different branches of literature and ſcience. This is unqueſtionably one of the moſt important periods of life, as from its management the whole picture of human conduct very frequently takes its colouring. As the principles it inculcates in different ages, in different countries, and among

Digitized by Google

different ſects, parties and claſſes of people, are not only very often radically different, but ſometimes diametrically oppoſite; from this variety reſults, in a great meaſure, the ſtriking diverſity of general ideas and current opinions. The prejudices of education generally cleave to the mind through life, at leaſt, it requires great ſtrength of underſtanding as well as extenſive information to ſhake off their influence.

But, without examining the principles of ſects and parties, whether political or religious, or tracing the current opinions of different ages and countries, it is ſufficient to obſerve that various plans of education have been adopted in our own times, and in our own country, where the ſame end is propoſed, but different methods of obtaining it have been tried. The grand queſtion, however, ſetting aſide minute details and trifling diſtinctions in the ſyſtem of juvenile inſtruction, ſeems to turn on the advantages and diſadvantages of public and private tuition.

A public education is generally ſuppoſed to be accompanied with ſome conſiderable advantages, of which a private tuition is neceſſarily deſtitute. It is, in the firſt place,

Digitized by Google

eſteemed conducive to the acquiſition of that eaſy confidence which is ſo generally applauded, and is unqueſtionably of great uſe in life. If the ſuppoſition, that this quality is attainable in a public and unattainable in a private education, could be proved juſtifiable, it would powerfully contribute to caſt the balance in favour of the former. This bold and eaſy aſſurance, if not carried beyond the bounds of moderation and decency, has, in every tranſaction of life, a decided advantage over that baſhful timidity which totally diſqualifies a perſon for making any figure in public. It is not, however, to be acquired in a ſeminary of turbulent boys, among whom, noiſe and impudence exclude reaſon and reflection, and are the principal ingredients in their ſocial intercourſe, but by a gradual and well-timed introduction into company, where various kinds of converſation contribute to amuſement and inſtruction, and where the youthful mind may not only imbibe a variety of knowledge, and learn to form juſt ideas of a number of things appertaining to life, but alſo acquire a decency of behaviour, and a propriety and elegance of expreſſion, not to be learnt in a tumultuous rabble of petulant children. It has indeed, been frequently obſerved, that thoſe who have been educated in

Digitized by Google

public ſchools are generally as baſhful and timid in any other company than that of their playmates, as thoſe whoſe education has been more private, which ſhews that various converſation with the world can alone inſpire a well grounded and becoming aſſurance in diſcourſe and behaviour, which is ſomething very different from the troubleſome and noiſy petulance of ignorant ſelf-ſufficiency.

The whole ſum of the advantages of a public education may then be reduced to theſe two particulars, the emulation that competition is ſuppoſed to excite among numbers engaged in the ſame purſuits, and the friendſhips and connexions which are often formed in public ſeminaries, and are ſometimes of real utility in the future tranſactions of life. The former of theſe advantages, however, exiſts in imagination rather than in reality. Every one who is acquainted with the diſpoſitions of children, may eaſily perceive that their predominant inclination is not love of fame, but love of eaſe, of thoughtleſs indolence of mind; and crowded ſchools afford too many opportunities of indulging this propenſity. The attention of the maſter is too much divided to be able to watch

Digitized by Google

narrowly over the conduct and progreſs of his pupils, to direct minutely their application to real vagrant inattention, and excite dull ſtupidity to active exertion. Let every perſon who has common ſenſe, and is ſufficiently ſkilled in arithmetical computations to calculate the number of minutes in a day, conſider what portion of time can be allotted to the inſtruction of each individual, and he will be at no loſs to account for the ſlow progreſs made by the generality of pupils.

It is commonly ſuppoſed that emulation and exertion may be excited by a ſkilful and appropriate application of applauſe and reproof, by well-timed exhortations and various other means. This may certainly be done, in regard to ſuch as are of a docile temper, and endowed with genius; but among the majority of children, no encouragements, no reproofs, no inducements whatever, will produce any more than a very tranſient effect. Indolent inattention will predominate over every conſideration, and ſluggiſh indifference will impede every endeavour of the preceptor, whoſe attention is directed to ſuch a multiplicity of objects, and divided among ſo great a number of pupils, that he cannot ſtrictly inſpect the operations of each mind he undertakes to form.

Digitized by Google

Most of thoſe inconveniences may be prevented by a private education. The judicious preceptor, who has only a ſmall number of pupils under his care, will be able to watch the gradual progreſs of each; to lead them forward ſtep by ſtep in literary improvements, and to obſerve the progreſſive unfoldings of the mind. That ſtupid inattention and ſluggiſh indifference, ſo common in youth, may be eaſily overcome by a teacher who has only ten or a dozen ſcholars, but can never be eradicated if his attention be divided among fifty or ſixty, when, conſequently, not more than ſeven or eight minutes in a day can be devoted to the inſtruction of each, a portion of time much too ſmall for the purpoſe of directing application, communicating knowledge, and rectifying miſapprehenſion.

In general reaſoning we muſt adhere to general principles, and ground our arguments upon general obſervations. Some young perſons are of ſo docile a diſpoſition, and of ſo comprehenſive a genius, that, in whatever ſeminary, or under whatever mode of inſtruction they are placed, no impediment can hinder them from making a conſiderable advancement. Some, from the firſt dawn of reaſon, diſplay a love of

Digitized by Google

learning, an accuracy of obſervation, a ſteadineſs of attention, and a quickneſs of comprehenſion, which, with little inſtruction, will enable them to make a rapid progreſs in any branch of ſcience or literature propoſed to them as an object of laudable purſuit; but we muſt always form our eſtimates from the majority, and every one who has been converſant in ſchools, muſt have obſerved, that the far greater number of children have little or no propenſity to learning. Many are ſo far from deſiring to make any acquiſitions of that kind, that they will learn nothing but what is inculcated by inſtructions a thouſand times repeated; and where the pupils are numerous, theſe continual repetitions are impoſſible. The multiplicity of buſineſs cauſes many things to be neglected, and ſeveral minutiæ in the detail of education to be far leſs attended to than is requiſite.

Emulation is more eaſily excited among a ſmall number of pupils than in a crowded ſeminary, where every artifice is uſed, and commonly with ſucceſs, to elude the maſter's vigilance, to indulge habits of inattention, and to conceal negligence, error, and miſapprehenſion. It has been generally obſerved, that large and populous cities are for the moſt part more corrupt

Digitized by Google

than ſmall towns and country villages. A numerous population hides vice and irregularity from public obſervation, and affords to crimes an equal facility of commiſſion and concealment. Among children, as among men, irregularities paſs unnoticed in the crowd: emulation is extinguiſhed among the multitude of loiterers, attention diſtracted by buſtle and noiſy tumult, and indolence excuſed and ſanctioned by generality of example.

The friendſhips contracted at public ſchools, have always been conſidered as one of the peculiar advantages of a public education; and this conſideration, it muſt be acknowledged, is of ſome importance. Thoſe connexions, indeed, are for the moſt part ſoon forgotten after the parties are ſeparated, and have exchanged their juvenile paſtimes for the more ſerious concerns of life; but ſometimes they have proved permanent, and when almoſt obliterated, have been revived by accident, and produced important effects. Theſe friendſhips of early life, however, are generally formed among thoſe who are ſufficiently advanced in years to be capable of receiving laſting impreſſions, and not among ſuch as are in the ſtate of

Digitized by Google

childhood, in which the mind fickle, puerile, and capricious, is incapable of a durable attachment.

To conduct the education of youth of both ſexes upon rational principles, thoſe who can afford the expence would do well to provide a private tutor for their children during the early part of their education; and when they have made a tolerable progreſs, and attained to an age of obſervation and reflection, they certainly ought to be placed in ſome reputable ſeminary, where they may finiſh their ſtudies, and begin their entrance into life. This would be the moſt proper and eligible mode of education, and is, indeed, the only method that is well calculated for attaining the grand object of all juvenile inſtruction, the initiation of youth in the knowledge of literature and of the world. By the leiſure which a private tutorage leaves to the maſter, and the calm tranquillity it affords to the ſcholar, the elements of learning may be inſtilled with eaſe and accuracy, and a ſure foundation laid, on which the ſuperſtructure of public education may be carried to any height.

In the inſtruction of youth, the developement of the mind, and the formation of its ideas,

Digitized by Google

ought to be carefully attended to, their combinations directed, and their aſſociations properly adapted. This however, can be obſerved only in a courſe of private tuition, or in thoſe ſeminaries where a ſmall number of pupils are admitted at advanced prices. Such is, therefore, the plan which perſons of affluence ought to adopt, at leaſt, during ſome time, until their children have attained to a certain age, and their minds begin to be formed. It cannot be expected, that in a numerous ſchool, any attention can be paid to the important taſk of teaching "the young idea how to ſhoot," at leaſt, unleſs the number of teachers be multiplied in proportion to that of the ſcholars; for although this is of indiſpenſable neceſſity in the proper cultivation of the juvenile mind, it is abſolutely impracticable in a ſeminary conſiſting of more than five or ſix pupils.

To teach children merely to read, is not all that is neceſſary towards illuminating their underſtanding. They ought to be inſtructed in the ſignification as well as the ſound of words, and taught to annex to them the ideas which they were deſigned to impreſs on the mind. The books which are put into their hands ſhould be ſuited to their years and their proficiency, and

Digitized by Google

every ſentence they read ought to be fully explained to them, until its meaning be perfectly underſtood. By this procedure, diligently and perſeveringly continued, they would acquire a knowledge of things as well as of words, and ſtore their minds with ideas at the ſame time that they are learning to read their vernacular language. A youth, thus initiated, will enter on a courſe of public education with incalculable advantages, and make an extraordinary proficiency, through the facility which he will find in his ſtudies and the pleaſure that will accompany his future purſuits.

One of the greateſt advantages accruing from private tuition, is the habit of early attention. This is a qualification of the moſt beneficial tendency, and of which the utility can ſcarcely be eſtimated in its full extent; but it will hardly ever be acquired in a crowded academy. Nature may, indeed, beſtow it in any ſituation, but in a large ſchool it muſt be entirely her gift; for its acquiſition cannot be facilitated to a child ſcarcely paſt the age of infancy, by placing him in a numerous aſſemblage of boys or girls, whoſe inattention and noiſy petulance are far from having any tendency to ſtimulate him to application.

Digitized by Google

Those parents who cannot afford the expence of private tutorage, might, in a great meaſure, obviate that inconvenience by taking upon themſelves the early part of their children's education. This might generally be done, as the greateſt part of parents, even of the poorer ſort, can read, and many of them can write, and ſome know the firſt principles of arithmetic. It would exceedingly facilitate and advance the important buſineſs of education, if they would take the pains to communicate what they know to their children. Very few, however, will give themſelves this trouble, and the general excuſe, for this neglect, is want of leiſure; but there are few families where either the father or the mother might not find ten minutes every day to employ in ſo laudable an undertaking, and this would be more than can ſometimes be devoted to that purpoſe by the maſter to whoſe ſchool they are ſent. The poorer ſort, in particular, would find their account in adopting this method in the education of their offspring. They might, many of them, teach their children to read the new teſtament, and ſome of them might carry them on to a higher pitch of improvement. If they can afford to put them to ſchool, a leſſon or two in the evening, while the

Digitized by Google

father and mother ſit by the fire ſide, would exceedingly facilitate their progreſs in learning; and certainly a parent could not have a more agreeable employment than to contribute as much as poſſible to the improvement of his children, nor a more pleaſing amuſement, than to contemplate the gradual developement of their minds.

By purſuing ſuch a plan, many excellent purpoſes would be anſwered. It would ſave the money of the poor, and procure to their children, at leaſt, with the addition of a little ſchool education, ſuch a ſtock of learning as might be ſuitable to their ſituation in life; and the general reſult would be, that the children of the lower claſs being thus inſtructed, would be enabled to confer on their offspring the ſame benefit, which, by ſucceſſive communication, from one generation to another, might, in an increaſed degree, be tranſmitted to the lateſt poſterity.

Another common excuſe alledged by thoſe parents who, although not deſtitute of education themſelves, will not give themſelves the trouble of communicating any inſtructions to their children, is, that "they break their patience, and that they cannot make them learn." The reaſon of this is,

Digitized by Google

becauſe they will not perſevere in ſuch a manner as to ſee their labours crowned with ſucceſs. Forgetting the thoughtleſs years of childhood, they have not the perſeverance to overcome thoſe defects to which they themſelves were once liable and which then exerciſed the patience of their inſtructors. They ſend their children, however, to ſchool, and then, if they do not learn, they never fail to blame the maſter for the ſlowneſs of their advancement, without conſidering that he has not, perhaps, half ſo much time to beſtow in teaching them as they might employ for that purpoſe at home. It is ſurely unreaſonable to think that others ſhould perform, with ſo much eaſe, things that we ourſelves find ſo difficult.

It may, indeed, be alledged that the maſter of a ſchool being experienced in his profeſſion, underſtands the method of inſtructing youth much better than thoſe who have not been accuſtomed to that employment. In regard to ſuch pupils as are tolerably advanced, this obſervation is certainly juſt; but it is equally certain, that parents who can read and write, may, nearly as well as the moſt ſkilful maſter, inſtruct their children as far as they themſelves have been

Digitized by Google

inſtructed; for patience and perſeverance in this caſe are more requiſite than any ſyſtematic methods. Children, until they have attained to a certain age, are to be taught by practice, by repeated leſſons, rather than by rules and theories which they can neither underſtand nor remember.

Parents who pretend that they have not the leiſure, but who in fact will not take the pains to inſtruct their children, naturally expect that the ſchoolmaſter being paid for his work, ought to apply to it with diligence. This, indeed, he muſt do, or feel the reproach of his conſcience for neglecting ſo important a charge. The inſtruction of the riſing generation is, indeed, a buſineſs of the moſt momentous concern, and on the manner in which it is performed, a great part of the happineſs or miſery of poſterity depends; but this ought to be conſidered by parents as well as teachers. As the difficulties it preſents are ſo numerous and ſo great, the emoluments it produces ſo ſmall, and conſequently the ſchools ſo much crowded, the time of teachers ſo much divided, and their attention ſo much diſtracted, every hand ought to help in an affair of ſuch incalculable importance. Too much, indeed, cannot be done to

Digitized by Google

facilitate the ſucceſs of thoſe who take upon themſelves an employment ſo difficult, ſo laborious, and ſo conducive to the benefit of the community. It is a duty which the dictates of conſcience, the law of natural juſtice, and the welfare of ſociety, impoſe on public teachers to uſe their beſt endeavours for the advancement of the pupils committed to their charge, and for whoſe inſtruction they are paid; but let it not be forgotten that it is alſo a duty impoſed by nature on parents, to labour by all poſſible means for the good of their offspring.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY IX.

ON THE SAME.

IT ſeems ſomewhat ſurpriſing that in no country of Europe any national ſyſtem of education has been eſtabliſhed. Such an inſtitution, by inſtructing the great maſs of the people, at a ſeaſon of life when the mind unoccupied and equally free from paſſion and prejudice, is ſuſceptible of any impreſſions, and unacquainted with the troubles and cares incident to a more advanced period, is at full leiſure to attend to inſtruction, would perhaps be of not much leſs utility than a national church. The former would, at leaſt by ſeconding the efforts of the latter, facilitate to the multitude the knowledge of its doctrines, and by illuminating their mind render them more obſervant of its precepts. If we reflect on the incalculable benefits which might reſult from a national inſtitution of this kind, adapted to inſtruct the great maſs of the people at an early period of life in their duty to God, to their Prince, to their country, and to ſociety in general, and in ſuch uſeful learning as might

Digitized by Google

ſuit their ſituation, and thus make them good chriſtians, good ſubjects, and uſeful members of the ſtate, it muſt appear ſomewhat extraordinary that nothing of the kind has been eſtabliſhed in any country of the European world. The inſtitution of a ſyſtem of national education was much talked of in France a little after the commencement of the revolution, but it does not appear to have been carried into effect. Indeed, the plan formed by Condorcet and his colleagues was not calculated to anſwer any beneficial purpoſe; on the contrary, its avowed object was to obliterate every idea of religion, and to eradicate from the minds of the riſing generation every notion of chriſtian morality. A plan thus modelled, on the avowed principles of infidelity, was ill calculatad to render a nation either wiſe or good, and conſequently its failure is not to be regretted.

While univerſities have been eſtabliſhed for the higher claſſes, for thoſe who are deſigned for the learned profeſſions; and while the beneficial effects of thoſe public inſtitutions have been ſo conſpicuous, while the eye is delighted with viewing, and the mind with contemplating the improvements of the civilized world, and while the incalculable importance of

Digitized by Google

enlightening the human intellect in the commencement of its operations, and of rectifying the ideas in early youth is univerſally acknowledged, the philoſophical obſerver of the ſtate of ſociety ſees, with wonder and regret, that no uniform method has ever been taken for the inſtruction of the great maſs of the people, although it is evident that the tranquillity and happineſs of the community depend, in a very conſiderable degree, on the ſtate of popular information and popular manners. This view, of ſo important a ſubject, naturally leads to an enquiry into the cauſes of ſuch a defect in the moral and ſocial ſyſtem of civilized Europe.

During the long period of time commonly denominated the gothic ages, and particularly diſtinguiſhed by the univerſal prevalence of the feudal ſyſtem, learning was little eſteemed by the great, and of little uſe to the people, who being attached to the ſoil, and ſolely employed in its cultivation, or in following the Lord to the wars, were ſtrangers to every kind of commerce. Being almoſt totally deſtitute of money, and poſſeſſing little property of any kind, the peaſant had no need of underſtanding arithmetical calculations, and as little of knowing how to write; nor was reading much

Digitized by Google

more neceſſary in his ſituation. In his temporal affairs he was almoſt abſolutely at the diſpoſal of the feudal chief, and in regard to his ſpiritual concerns he was under the guidance and controul of an eccleſiaſtical director. In ſuch a ſtate of things, it is no wonder that the inſtruction of the people was conſidered as an object of little importance.

PRINCELY temporalities were conferred on the church. Eccleſiaſtics were raiſed to the ſummit of power and opulence, vaſt eſtates were annexed to monaſteries, and bodies of men who had made vows of poverty, were, by the piety or the ſuperſtition of the times, enriched beyond the limits of diſcretion, while the education of the people was almoſt wholly neglected. All this, however, originated not only in the ſpirit, but the circumſtances of the times. Superficial obſervation and reaſoning may, indeed, attribute the neglect of popular education, ſolely to the indifference of thoſe who bore rule over the people; but a little reflection will convince an impartial enquirer, that an inſurmountable obſtacle oppoſed the diſſemination of literary knowledge.

Digitized by Google

Before the abolition of the feudal ſyſtem, the extenſion of commerce, and the influx of wealth, if learning, as already obſerved, was of little uſe to the common people, its acquiſition was alſo impoſſible; and if any plan of national education had, in thoſe unpropitious times, been formed, exiſting circumſtances would have rendered it abortive. The exorbitant price of books muſt have been an inſuperable obſtacle to its execution. In the ages alluded to, the whole circulating caſh of Great Britan would not have been ſufficient to purchaſe all the books at this day, uſed in her various ſeminaries; and the ſame remark is applicable to all the other countries of Europe. The invention of the art of printing was that alone, which, by diminiſhing their value in a proportion difficult to calculate, and almoſt incredible, could place the acquiſition of literary knowledge within the reach of the people. Before that important diſcovery, which conſtitutes ſo diſtinguiſhed an epoch in the hiſtory of the human mind, it is ſcarcely probable that the greateſt exertions of Princes, philoſophers, legiſlators, and churchmen, could have been able to render effective any plan for the education of the lower orders of the community, and the diffuſion of learning among the great maſs of mankind.

Digitized by Google

If this inſuperable obſtacle had not exiſted, if books had been as cheap as they are at this day, it would not have been difficult to eſtabliſh a ſyſtem of national education, at the ſame time with a national church, and to have provided in the ſame manner for its ſupport. The former would have been an excellent appendage to the latter: it would have ſeconded its efforts, facilitated the underſtanding of its doctrines, and ſtrengthened its influence. The moſt beneficial effects muſt have reſulted from their concomitancy.

If the minds of the people were more enlightened by an appropriate education, the labours of the clergy would be rendered more eaſy, more agreeable, and far more ſucceſsful. How good ſoever may be the ſeed that is ſown, an indifferent crop muſt be expected, if the ground has not been previouſly put into a condition proper for its reception. None but thoſe who have attentively obſerved the ſtate of the human mind among the lower claſſes, can be fully acquainted with the groſſneſs of their conceptions, their abſurd aſſociations of ideas, the dullneſs of their comprehenſion, and the general obſcurity which clouds their underſtandings.

Digitized by Google

When the mind is left deſtitute of early inſtruction, when the ideas, like plants without culture, are ſuffered to riſe up at random, to be ſmothered in a maſs of ſenſual impreſſions, or implicated in a labyrinth of groſs and abſurd aſſociations, it is not to be expected that ſuch a field of intellectual ſterility can be fertilized by the efforts of the clergy. It is, indeed, impoſſible, that the underſtanding of perſons deſtitute of education, ſhould be much enlightened, and their ideas rectified and expanded, by liſtening once a week to a ſermon, of which, through their defective knowledge of the words and phraſes of their native language, they can only comprehend a very ſmall part. A clergyman makes a good, and according to his own opinion, a very intelligible ſermon, level, as he ſuppoſes to the meaneſt capacity. The auditors ſtare, with an air of attention, and the preacher imagines that they are returned home ſtrongly impreſſed with a conviction of the great truths that he has delivered, and the vaſt importance of the moral precepts which he has propoſed for the regulation of their practice. But the reality of the caſe is, that they never underſtood a third part of his diſcourſe. Their incapacity of underſtanding the whole rendered them inattentive to the reſt; and their miſapprehenſion of ſome

Digitized by Google

parts having interrupted the concatenation, and deſtroyed the connexion, they ſoon forget thoſe particulars which they did hear and underſtand.

A reſpectable, pious, and learned miniſter of a country pariſh, ſaid to me, lately, in familiar converſation, "I conſtantly endeavour to compoſe my ſermons in as plain a ſtile as poſſible, and yet, I have every reaſon to believe, that more than half of my congregation do not underſtand them, and return from the church no better informed than they came:" I anſwered him briefly thus, "Is this, Sir, a new diſcovery that you have made? It is nothing more than what I could have told you long ago." It is, indeed, ſcarcely poſſible to explain the ſublime doctrines of religion, in language ſuitable to the untutored capacities of thoſe who are deſtitute of education, and unaccuſtomed to think.

Every one who has the curioſity to enter into converſation on theſe ſubjects, with people of this deſcription, will be readily convinced of the juſtneſs of this obſervation; and whoever has well conſidered the reciprocal influence of language and ideas, will eaſily perceive that this muſt ever be the caſe with untutored minds. When the Spaniards, after the conqueſt of

Digitized by Google

America, began to attempt the converſion of the natives, they ſoon perceived their incapability of comprehending the myſteries of chriſtianity. The powers of their uncultivated minds were ſo limited, their obſervations and reflections reached ſo little beyond the objects of ſenſe, that they ſeemed not to have the capacity of forming abſtract ideas, and had no terms of language to expreſs them. To ſuch men the ſublime doctrines of religion were abſolutely incomprehenſible. The Spaniſh eccleſiaſtics, or at leaſt a great many of them, attributed to a phyſical, what was the effect of a moral cauſe, and a Synod held at Lima, declared the Americans, through a defect of underſtanding, incapable of receiving the Euchariſt. This decree, however, was reſcinded by Pope Paul 3d, who poſſeſſing a more accurate knowledge of the nature and operations of the human mind, iſſued his celebrated Bull of A. D. 1537, in which he declared the natives of America capable of being admitted to the ſacraments, and of enjoying all the privileges of chriſtians. The caſe of the untutored Americans is applicable to the inhabitants of all uncivilized countries, and with ſome modifications, to the lower claſſes of people in thoſe that are civilized. The knowledge of language, the formation of ideas, and the habit of thinking, always run

Digitized by Google

parallel, their operations are concomitant, and their effects reciprocal. Thoſe who know no more of language, than what ſerves to expreſs their thoughts or feelings on the moſt familiar ſubjects, which is almoſt the full extent of vulgar phraſeology, are, in a great meaſure, incapable of forming abſtract ideas, and of carrying their reflections beyond the objects of ſenſe, ſo as to underſtand a diſcourſe which turns on the ſublime myſteries of chriſtianity. The Americans, in general, did not refuſe their aſſent to the chriſtian religion, when it was preached to them by the Spaniſh eccleſiaſtics; but it was plainly perceived that their faith was only a torpid acquieſcence, and that no arguments produced any rational conviction on their minds. And it is an obſervation that might be made in every country of civilized and chriſtian Europe, that a very conſiderable part of the common people, although they may perhaps regularly attend the public worſhip of their reſpective eſtabliſhments, underſtand very little more of the doctrines of their own churches, than of the tenets of Mahometaniſm.

In conſidering the advantages of early inſtruction, it muſt be acknowledged that youth ſet right at firſt, ſometimes go wrong afterwards;

Digitized by Google

but ſuch inſtances muſt be reckoned among thoſe irregularities, which ought not to be regarded in forming general views, and adopting general meaſures. The conduct of the great majority of mankind, is always regulated by the general principles and motives of human action. That right principles have an uniform tendency to produce propriety of conduct, is a reaſonable inference, and its truth is confirmed by experience. Partial deviations may be ranked among thoſe eccentricities of human nature, from which we cannot draw any general concluſion.

Reasoning from the analogies of experience, and from all the obſervations that can be made on the influence of early impreſſions on the human mind, we are naturally led to conclude that a ſyſtem of national education, well planned, and well conducted on the liberal principles of general chriſtianity, ſuch as would inſpire ſentiments of religion, morality, loyalty and patriotiſm, and ſetting aſide all bigotted attachments to opinions, give admiſſion to all ſects and denominations, could not fail of being productive of all the benefits the moſt ſanguine ſpeculator could expect. It is not impoſſible, that ſuch a plan may yet be formed and carried into execution,

Digitized by Google

at ſome future period, in all or moſt of the European countries. It muſt be confeſſed, that it would yet be attended with great difficulties, although the invention of printing has removed the grand and indeed inſuperable obſtacle, which, during ſo many ages, rendered it impracticable. By general principles of calculation, which the moſt authenticated ſtatements of European population afford, the expence, which is the moſt formidable obſtacle to the execution of ſo beneficial a project, might be eſtimated, although not correctly, yet with a tolerable approximation to truth. The population of the united kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, cannot be eſtimated at more than about fourteen or fifteen millions, of which, ſuppoſing the period of public education to extend from the age of eight to that of fourteen, not more than one fifth-part, or about three millions at the moſt, could at one time be under tuition. This number of pupils, allotting twenty to each maſter, and none ought to have more, would require one hundred and fifty thouſand inſtructors, who, at a ſalary of ſixty pounds per ann. each, would require nine millions of pounds per ann. for their ſupport. This ſtatement, which in its general principles, is applicable to all the other European countries, exhibits an

Digitized by Google

expenditure too great for any of them to ſupport; for although it might be nominally leſs in moſt of the continental ſtates than in Great Britain, it would not be leſs in reality when their relative wealth is taken into the account.

THE foregoing calculation, however, is made on an extenſive and liberal plan, which might be conſiderably reduced. If the period of education were limited to the three years, from nine to twelve, inſtead of the ſix from eight to fourteen, only half of the before ſuppoſed number would be under tuition at once, and only ſeventy-five thouſand preceptors required, and if the number of pupils allotted to each were extended to thirty, no more than fifty thouſand maſters would be neceſſary. If to each of theſe, a ſalary of fifty, inſtead of ſixty pounds per ann. were allowed, the whole expence of the inſtitution would amount to only two millions and an half per ann. On this contracted plan, the great buſineſs of national education would be carried on in a manner beyond all compariſon, better than that in which it is now managed. If we conſider alſo, the many ſchools already endowed, and the conſequent deductions on that account, together with the number of the more opulent members of the community, who would prefer

Digitized by Google

academies of their own chooſing to thoſe of the national eſtabliſhment, the public expence of that inſtitution might undoubtedly be reduced below the ſum of two millions per ann.

This rough eſtimate of the expences, attending a plan of national inſtruction, which a probable calculation exhibits, may furniſh us with a tolerably juſt notion of the enormous amount of thoſe which a ſimilar inſtitution would have required, previous to the invention of printing, and ſhew the inſurmountable obſtacle, which has hitherto rendered a ſyſtem of popular education impracticable in every nation of the ancient and modern world, and which would even at preſent be ſufficiently difficult to ſurmount. The world, however, is not yet arrived at the utmoſt limits of improvement, and it is impoſſible to foreſee what events are concealed in the womb of futurity. Every age and almoſt every year, produces ſomething new. Schemes of public and private utility are daily formed, and new expedients diſcovered for the amelioration of human circumſtances. The age of ambition and conqueſt may paſs away, and the halcyon days of Europe arrive, when the inſtruction of the people, and the general improvement of the

Digitized by Google

human mind, will be eſteemed a more glorious project than the uſurpation of thrones, and the ſpoliation of kingdoms. If the expectation of the millenium ſhould ever be realiſed, this will undoubtedly be one of the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtics of that happy period, of which imagination delineates ſo grand and ſo faſcinating a picture.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY X.

ON POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS.

IN the hiſtory of every nation, ancient and modern, a number of pages might be filled with the diſplay of its ſuperſtitions. The annals of the world do not furniſh a ſingle exception to the propriety of a general application of this reproach; and it is an obſervation more true than pleaſing, that the people of this iſland, who think themſelves enlightened in a greater degree than moſt other nations, and ſo frequently ridicule, and with all the pride of ſelf-ſufficiency, condemn the ſuperſtitions of other countries, are not leſs ſuperſtitious than thoſe who are, in this reſpect, the objects of their cenſure. In every part of Europe, there are in vogue notions as groſsly abſurd as any that exiſt in the Mahometan, or we might even ſay in the Pagan countries of Aſia or Africa; and in England the current ſuperſtitions of the lower and middle claſſes, are not leſs abſurd than thoſe of the common people in Spain and Portugal. In this enlightened age, it might

Digitized by Google

appear ſuperfluous, and even abſurd, to enter on a philoſophical diſcuſſion of judicial aſtrology, of the various modes of fortune-telling, of faith in omens, and various kinds of prognoſtics, or of the almoſt general belief in the reality of apparitions, with a train of other ſuperſtitious notions too numerous to particularize, and too inſignificant to be noticed, was it not well known how generally they bewilder the minds of the vulgar, although it might ſeem incredible that ſuch groſs abſurdities ſhould exiſt in the minds of rational beings. Thoſe who are enlightened by philoſophy, or by pure and rational religion, are free from the influence of thoſe gloomy preſages, and mental horrors; but the number of perſons of this deſcription, conſtitute only a ſmall part of the maſs of mankind; and the ignorant vulgar are a prey to thoſe ſuperſtitions, which originating from different cauſes and circumſtances, derive all their force from the terrors naturally incident to weak and uninformed minds, in conjunction with that reſtleſs curioſity inherent in man, ever deſirous of unſealing the book of fate, and of reading his future deſtiny.

Of all the modes of divination which have exerciſed the invention, and bewildered the

Digitized by Google

imagination of mankind, judicial aſtrology has been the moſt extenſive and prevalent. Its duration has been from time immemorial, and its extenſion equal to that of the rudiments of ſcience and civilization. The exiſtence of this fallacious ſcience is firſt diſcovered at Babylon, where it is generally ſuppoſed to have originated, and its prevalence in that idolatrous and ſuperſtitious city is frequently mentioned and condemned by the prophets of Judah. Iſaiah, in particular, addreſſing himſelf to Babylon, challengeth her aſtrologers in theſe remarkable words: "Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counſels; let now the aſtrologers, the ſtar-gazers, the month prognoſticators, ſtand up, and ſave thee from theſe things that ſhall come upon thee." The time when this pretended ſcience originated is not known; but it ſeems that its prevalence and credit had attained to the higheſt pitch in Babylon, at the period in which Iſaiah propheſied, and its influence continued undiminiſhed, until the capture of the city, and the ſubverſion of the monarchy, by the Perſians, under Cyrus.

The origin of judicial aſtrology, was an effect of Zabaiſm, the ancient religion of the Chaldeans, which, at that time, had degenerated

Digitized by Google

into image worſhip, the groſſeſt ſpecies of idolatry. Thoſe pure ideas of the eſſence and attributes of the Supreme Being, which mankind originally poſſeſſed, being obſcured by the ignorance of the human underſtanding, and the vagaries of imagination, the moſt extravagant chimeras had been ſubſtituted in their place, and admitted into the theological ſyſtems of all nations, except the Jews, a circumſtance which ſhows, into what abſurdities reaſon may fall, when left without the guidance of revelation.

One of the firſt, and indeed the moſt excuſable errors into which the bewildered imagination of man began, by its want of revelation to deviate, was Zabaiſm or the worſhip of the heavenly bodies. Men were ignorant of their nature, and could not but look upon them with amazement. They ſuppoſed that theſe glorious orbs, whoſe ſplendour they admired, and whoſe regular motions they obſerved, were ordained for ſome great purpoſe; and while the philoſophical part of mankind conſidered them as rulers of the world, in ſubordination to the author of nature, the ignorant having loſt the primitive idea of an univerſal and ſovereign intelligence, might readily conceive them to be the only gods that governed the univerſe.

Digitized by Google

THE Babylonians and the Egyptians formed the two firſt political communities mentioned in hiſtory. Fortunate in the choice of a ſituation, bleſſed with a luxuriant ſoil, and a climate favourable to vegetation, they firſt, among the nations, roſe to opulence, and firſt began to inveſtigate the paths of ſcience, and explore the receſſes of philoſophy. Their advances were as great as could be ſuppoſed in the infancy of the world, when the rudiments of knowledge were to be eſtabliſhed without any previous lights for their direction. If their philoſophy was imperfect, and in many reſpects erroneous, as it was not founded on experiment, but was almoſt wholly conjectural, we ought not to be aſtoniſhed; and we have ſtill leſs reaſon to wonder at the extravagances of their theology. When man, unaſſiſted by ſupernatural light, attempts, by his own feeble powers, to explore that abyſs which is totally concealed from his view, and infinitely beyond the reach of his comprehenſion, it is no wonder that reaſon, loſt in conjecture, ſhould yield to the power of imagination, ſuffer its predominancy, and adopt its extravagancies.*

* The reader will here excuſe a repetition of the ſubſtance of about two pages of the "Letters on Ancient and Modern Hiſtory," without which this eſſay could not be made complete.

Digitized by Google

MANKIND, conſcious of their own unworthineſs, appear to have always conſidered ſome mediatorial agency as neceſſary between them and the Sovereign of the Univerſe, whoſe throne they did not think themſelves worthy to approach, and whoſe cares they could not ſuppoſe to be extended to them. The Babylonians imagined, that in the celeſtial orbs, they ſaw thoſe mediatorial and ſubaltern divinities, which, as they ſuppoſed, governed the world in ſubordination to the Supreme and Univerſal Being. Their creative imagination predominating over reaſon, and running without reſtraint into wild exuberance, firſt induced them to fancy that every orb was the habitation of an intelligent being, who had his particular department in the government of the world, and the diſpoſal of human affairs, and afterwards to ſuppoſe, or at leaſt to pretend, that by obſerving their motions and poſitions, they might diſcover the effects which they were about to produce. This was the hypotheſis of the Babylonian prieſts; but whether it originated in their ſuperſtition, or their policy, is a problem of which we ſhall never have the means of obtaining a ſolution. When once eſtabliſhed, however, it was an inexhauſtible ſource of emolument, and an engine of power to which the ignorance, the ſuperſtition,

Digitized by Google

and inquiſitive curioſity of their Princes and people gave a peculiar efficacy.

A ſcience calculated to give its profeſſors ſo much credit, could not fail of being adopted by the artful and deſigning in other countries. It had raiſed the prieſts of Babylon to the higheſt pitch of authority, and thoſe of Egypt, whoſe theological ſyſtem, like that of the Babylonians, was a myſterious juggle, calculated for the monopolization of power and profit, were too ſagacious not to perceive its utility. The Egyptian prieſts had made it a fundamental principle of their theology, to acquire an unlimited influence over mankind, and could not be ſo inattentive to their own intereſts, as to neglect an engine of power, which had rendered thoſe of Babylon abſolute maſters of the wealth, the bodies, and minds of the people, and given them an aſcendancy in public affairs, which enabled them to controul the counſels of their Princes, and direct the operations of their armies.

Astrology having thus originated from the perverſion of aſtronomy, to the purpoſes of prieſtcraft, ſoon diffuſed itſelf over all thoſe

Digitized by Google

nations of the Pagan world, among whom the faint light of ſcience had begun to dawn. To this end, the ſtudy of aſtronomy appears to have at firſt been almoſt every where directed, and aſtrological prediction ſeems to have been the firſt grand object of its cultivation. This, like all the other modes of divination, was prohibited by the Moſaical law, and conſequently, was never ſtudied or practiſed by the Jews, except in the times of their deviations to idolatry; but it was univerſally adopted by the Pagans, with whoſe philoſophical and theological ideas it was perfectly conſiſtent. It was indeed ſo uſeful an engine in the hands of the prieſts, and ſo perfectly in uniſon with the inquiſitive curioſity of the people, in regard to futurity, ſo well adapted to the deſigns of the crafty, and ſo agreeable to the inclinations and views of the ignorant, that no wonder can be made of its eaſy adoption, and extenſive diffuſion.

The credit of this fallacious ſcience, of which the exiſtence is compatible with only a very ſmall tincture of aſtronomy, always diminiſhes in proportion as the latter is improved; and it does not appear to have ever been held in ſo high eſtimation among the Greeks and Romans, at leaſt the philoſophical part of them, as among

Digitized by Google

the nations of more remote antiquity, eſpecially the Babylonians. The ſuperſtition of ſucceeding times, took a ſomewhat different turn, and although judicial aſtrology was cultivated by the Greeks, they do not ſeem to have conſidered that ſcience compatible with ſound philoſophy; and their prieſts endeavoured to maintain, by the means of their oracles, that influence over the minds of men, which thoſe of Babylon had acquired by conſulting the ſtars.

Judicial aſtrology, however, although prohibited and condemned by the chriſtian as well as the Jewiſh revelation, and exploded by ſound philoſophy, gained, during the times of ignorance, almoſt the ſame degree of credit among the profeſſors of chriſtianity, which it had formerly acquired in the Pagan world; and a modern reader is aſtoniſhed to find that this pretended ſcience was in the ſixteenth century, during the reigns of Charles 9th, Henry 3d, &c. as much in vogue, and its predictions as ſeriouſly believed in the higheſt circles of Paris, and at the court of France, as it had been at Babylon in the time of Nebuchadnezzar and Belſhazzar. Its influence was little leſs at that time in England, and other countries in Europe, not among the vulgar alone, but among perſons of the higheſt

Digitized by Google

rank, and of no contemptible abilities; and even ſo late as the middle of the ſeventeenth century, it was not wholly extinguiſhed among the higher claſſes in this and other European countries. In this enlightened age, thoſe ancient ſuperſtitions are entirely exploded among perſons of rank and education. The light of philoſophy, and the improvement of aſtronomical knowledge, have illuminated the minds of the higher claſſes, but a very great majority of the inferior orders of the people, and even no ſmall number of thoſe who conſider themſelves ſomewhat above the vulgar, attach as great a degree of credit to the ſcience of judicial aſtrology, as to the authenticity of the ſcripture, and the doctrines of chriſtianity. Thouſands in every part of this kingdom, will have as decided an opinion of the ignorance of a perſon, who denies the influence of the planets on human affairs, as of the impiety of one who diſbelieves the popular tales of ghoſts and apparitions. Theſe, indeed, are the two kinds of ſuperſtition, which of all thoſe diſplayed in the hiſtory of the human mind, have had the moſt extenſive influence, and the longeſt duration, one of which, originating in the curioſity, and the other in the fears of mankind, have in all ages bewildered the imagination, and domineered over reaſon.

Digitized by Google

ARGUMENTS, level to every capacity, and of which the human underſtanding in every ſtate, from the higheſt pitch of philoſophical cultivation, to the loweſt degree of untutored common ſenſe, may perceive the appropriation and force ruſh in from every quarter to overturn judicial aſtrology, to demonſtrate its uncertainty, and expoſe its fallacy. Attempts, however, have been made by its votaries, to reconcile it with religion, and even to give it a ſcriptural foundation; and "The ſtars, in their courſes, fought againſt Siſera," has been triumphantly quoted, in order to ſupport this fallacious ſcience, by the authority of the ſacred oracles, and give to impoſture the ſanction of divine revelation. Perhaps we are not able to diſcover the preciſe meaning of this highly figurative expreſſion of Hebrew poetry; but it appears, in poetical language, to ſignify no more than that while the ſtars were advancing in their regular diurnal courſe, the defeat and deſtruction of Siſera were, with equal rapidity and certainty, approaching. But it is contrary to all the eſtabliſhed rules of interpretation, to infer from this metaphorical alluſion of oriental poetry, that the configurations and influence of the celeſtial bodies contributed to that event, or to draw from an inſulated and obſcure expreſſion, any concluſion in favour of

Digitized by Google

aſtrology, which, together with every other ſyſtem of divination is, by the whole tenor of ſcriptural authority, expreſsly condemned as ſinful, and exploded as fallacious.

The ſame artifices and induſtry have, notwithſtanding the general illumination of the preſent age, been employed to reconcile judicial aſtrology with philoſophy, to eſtabliſh the planetary influx in the ſyſtem of nature, and to rank its operation in the claſs of phyſical cauſes. A very ſmall ſhare, however, of philoſophical and aſtronomical knowledge, is ſufficient to invalidate its pretenſions; and a few plain and unanſwerable arguments, obvious to every reflecting mind, and intelligible to every underſtanding, will exhibit a clear demonſtration of its fallacy.

In the ſyſtem of nature, cauſes operate with a force, in a great meaſure proportioned to their proximity, and all phyſical, as well as moral power, has a ſphere of action, beyond which it produces no effect. As, therefore, every thing is the moſt powerfully influenced by proximate cauſes, and but little by ſuch as are exceedingly remote, it is evident, that from their immenſe diſtance, the planets can have

Digitized by Google

very little influence on this terreſtrial globe. The veering of the wind from North to South, or the contrary, produces a greater change in our atmoſphere than all the conjunctions, oppoſitions, trines, quartiles, &c. of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; and the neighbourhood of noxious moraſſes, or ſtagnant waters, will contaminate the air more than the moſt malevolent aſpects of thoſe planets. If, therefore, the ſtars can have but little effect on the phyſical circumſtances of this globe, it would be the extreme of abſurdity to ſuppoſe that they ſhould have any influence on the actions of its inhabitants, and the direction of human affairs, which depend far leſs on phyſical, than on moral cauſes.

The hour or moment of nativity is the important time of planetary influence, and its conſequences the grand object of aſtrological calculation; but the heavens revolve with an inconceivable rapidity, and the planets materially change their poſition during the time that the infant is making its entrance into the world. Beſides, if we conſider the nature of human circumſtances, they afford a multiplicity of arguments againſt this imaginary ſcience, ſufficient to ſtagger the moſt pliant credulity.

Digitized by Google

When the deſtructive peſtilence, or other epidemical diſeaſe, depopulates an extenſive region, indiſcriminately mowing down all ranks and ages, when bloody battles terminate the exiſtence of thouſands in one day, or tremendous earthquakes ſwallow up whole cities with their inhabitants, can we ſuppoſe that the multitudes of perſons, of different ages, deſcriptions, and nations, thus involved in one general calamity, were born under the ſame planetary influence, and that their fate was determined by the ſame configurations of the celeſtial bodies? The ſuppoſition requires a degree of credulity incompatible with reaſon, and to which imagination itſelf can ſcarcely give admiſſion.

If the exiſtence of this planetary influence were certain, an exact aſtrological hiſtory of the world would be neceſſary to inform us of the nature and extent of its operation on ſtates and communities, on bodies political or religious, on the riſe and progreſs of particular arts and ſciences, and on ſyſtems, eſtabliſhments, and aſſociations commercial or civil. No ſuch work, however, has, as far as we know, been at any time undertaken, at leaſt none ſuch has ever been accompliſhed. If the advocates of aſtrology would exhibit proofs of the truth of their ſcience,

Digitized by Google

and of the reality of the influence of the poſitions and aſpects of the planets on human affairs, let them carefully peruſe the hiſtory of the world, meaſure back the revolutions of the celeſtial orbs, and ſhew us in what manner their configurations have influenced and determined the courſe of mundane events. Let them then inform us how it happened, that ſo many ages elapſed before there was any poſition of the heavenly bodies favourable to the invention and improvement of the arts and ſciences. Let them tell us whether the rhetorical eloquence of the Greeks aroſe from ſome peculiar aſpect of the ſtars, or from the nature of their political ſyſtems, and civil inſtitutions. Let them aſſign a reaſon why, amidſt the inceſſant revolutions of the celeſtial bodies, their benign influence continually, or at leaſt, with very few and tranſient intermiſſions, beamed on Rome, until, by a ſeries of ſucceſsful wars, and almoſt uninterrupted conqueſts, that city, from a mud-walled village, became miſtreſs of the civilized and then known world, and accumulated its plundered wealth within her walls. Had they not, in the ſpace of ſo many centuries, one favourable ray to dart on any of the ſurrounding nations, which fell ſucceſſively under the power of her arms, and

Digitized by Google

enriched her with their ſpoils? Why did they at laſt ſo totally withdraw from her their benevolent influence, and turn towards her the moſt malevolent aſpects? And why, after the ſubverſion of the Roman power, did they not, until about the middle of the fifteenth century, beſtow one irradiating beam, on the arts and ſciences, on philoſophy and literature, in thoſe countries which formerly conſtituted the weſtern part of the empire? But above all, let them tell us the reaſon why, ſince the time of the creation, no celeſtial configuration has ever been favourable to hapleſs Africa, nor ever given birth to learning, and the arts, in any part of that extenſive continent, except in that contracted corner which is ſituated on the banks of the Nile. In taking a diſtinct view of the ſtate of the different nations, communities, and claſſes of mankind, innumerable problems of the ſame nature would preſent themſelves to the mind, and baffle the powers of conjecture.

If it were poſſible to demonſtrate the reality, and aſcertain the extent of the planetary influence on nations and collective bodies of men, it would ſtill be impoſſible to determine in what manner individuals might be implicated in its effects. The fate of the nation or community

Digitized by Google

determines the deſtiny of many, and in ſome meaſure affects the intereſts of almoſt all its individual members, who are drawn into the public vortex, and involved in the effects of national events by innumerable modes of implication, of which the conſequences, even if the reality and extent of this influence could be proved and aſcertained, would baffle all the calculations and predictions of aſtrology.

This fallacious ſcience, like other ſuperſtitions, has always had a predominancy over the minds of men, in thoſe countries where philoſophy and literature have not ſhed their irradiating influence. A late traveller, Dr. Wittman, in exhibiting the degrading ignorance and ſuperſtition of the Turks, relates, "that the launch of a ſhip of war was delayed till the report of a favourable opportunity had been made by the aſtrologers and dealers in magic," and very judiciouſly adds, "can ſuch a people be formidable." Mr. Wittman's remark is here exceedingly ſagacious; for nothing is more degrading to the mind than ſuperſtitions of theſe kinds; nothing more effectually weakens its energy, and diſqualifies it for arduous enterpriſes and vigorous exertions. Lord Nelſon did not ſtay to conſult the ſtars before he attacked the French fleet at

Digitized by Google

the mouth of the Nile, or forced the paſſage of the ſound, neither did General Bonaparte examine their configurations before the battles of Mantua and Marengo, nor did any one of that brilliant conſtellation of great naval and military commanders, Britiſh, French, and Auſtrian, whoſe names are too many, even to enumerate, and who diſtinguiſhed themſelves by ſuch ſplendid achievements in the late memorable conteſt, ever ſuſpend their operations, in order to calculate the tendency of the planetary influence, or wait for a favourable conjunction. It is ſomewhat extraordinary, that the artifices of fortune-tellers and arrogant pretenders, operating on the ſuperſtitions and fears of the ignorant, ſhould induce them to attach credit to theſe vain prognoſtics, when they ſee them totally diſregarded by all the enlightened part of mankind, by thoſe who are engaged in the moſt important affairs, who direct the operations of armies and the government of empires.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XI.

ON OMENS.

THE attention paid to omens or prognoſtics, appears ſtill more abſurd than the belief of judicial aſtrology, which, however, erroneous in its principles, and illuſory in its concluſions, has been ſupported by ſome arguments that might appear plauſible to ignorance, overpowered by ſuperficial reaſoning. It is, indeed, aſtoniſhing, and was it not an indiſputable fact, would ſeem incredible, that the human mind could ever degrade itſelf by ſuch abſurdities, or with fatal ingenuity, find ſuch expedients, in order to torture itſelf with deluſive hopes and groundleſs fears. A raven hovering near a houſe, alarms a whole family with his croaking, and chills it with the apprehenſion of ſome approaching mortality. If any one in the houſe happens at the ſame time to be ſick, it is deemed an infallible token of his diſſolution; but what connexion can ſound

Digitized by Google

reaſon and common ſenſe diſcover between the croaking of a raven, or the gnawing of a worm, in the language of ſuperſtition, the death watch, and the termination of human life. Does the raven hovering in ſearch of prey, or the worm that gnaws the wood of an old picture frame, know what is to be the termination of a diſeaſe, when it cannot be forſeen by any effort of the human underſtanding, cultivated and improved by the firſt medical inſtructions, founded on a rational theory, verified and confirmed by obſervation and experience. Has the all-wiſe Creator given to theſe creatures the knowledge which he has denied to man? For what purpoſe could it be given them, or how can we know that they poſſeſſed it? The ſame may be ſaid concerning a thouſand other prognoſtics equally ſuperſtitious and abſurd. A hare, one of the moſt inoffenſive of all animals, croſſing the traveller's road, forebodes ill ſucceſs to his affairs, or ſome unfortunate accident in his journey, and if any ſuch ſhould happen, that innocent quadruped is blamed, when all the reaſonings of philoſophy on the effects of phyſical cauſes cannot diſcover the leaſt connexion between the omen and the event, nor enable us to conceive how ſo inſignificant an occurrence can have any tendency, either to prognoſticate

Digitized by Google

or occaſion the diſappointment, or the accident ſuppoſed to have happened in conſequence.*

Omens originate in ignorance, ſuperſtition, human fears, or anxious expectation. A girl, in hopes of her approaching marriage, or a perſon flushed with expectation of ſucceſs in ſome favourite undertaking, may conſtrue the moſt trifling occurrence into a favourable omen, as one who is influenced by melancholy, or apprehenſive of diſappointment, will conſider it as a portent of diſaſter. If ſucceſs anſwer the eagerneſs of deſire, crown the enterprize, and realize hope, the reputation of the omen is eſtabliſhed. A perſon hears in the night a ſtrange noiſe, for which he cannot well account: ſome one in the

* Profeſſor Raff, of Goettingen, gives the following inſtance of the ſuperſtitious notions of the people of Germany:—"The ſtupid peaſant, ſays he, and the ſuperſtitious citizen, regard owls with horror and dread; they conſider theſe poor birds as the harbingers of death, and wherever their doleful cry is heard, they aſſure themſelves that ſome perſon is ſhortly to die in the neighbourhood, eſpecially in the houſe on which one of them has happened to perch for a moment. For the time the thing is conſidered as infallible. As ſoon as the fatal cry is heard, the people begin to tremble and grow pale, and if the ominous bird ſhould unfortunately happen to approach their habitation, or light on their roof, then, for certain, all is over." Thus we ſee how ſtriking a reſemblance there is between the ſuperſtition of Germany and that of England. This noxious weed is, indeed, the produce of every ſoil.

Digitized by Google

houſe perhaps is ſick, or falls ill, ſoon after. If the ſick perſon recovers, the omen is no more thought of; but if he happens to die, the perſon who heard the noiſe, which was probably no more than the creaking of a door hanging too looſe on its hinges, the cracking of a table, or ſome other piece of wooden furniture, alternately contracted and diſtended by the changes in the atmoſphere, begins to reflect on the circumſtance, and tells it to ſome other; it grows up into an omen, is introduced into the goſſipping circle, and chronicled among the tales of wonder in the neighbourhood.

When the mind reſigns itſelf to the domination of ſuperſtition, reaſon is ſilenced, and the underſtanding obſcured. Thought is no longer free, but is dragged along by the force of prejudice. Nothing is more dreadful than this tyrannic ſway. Imagination domineers over reaſon. The mind is a prey ſometimes to romantic hopes, but more frequently to groundleſs fears, and is crowded with a chaotic aſſemblage of abſurd and extravagant images.

The power of ſuperſtition over ſome minds is, indeed, almoſt incredible; and thoſe who have never had the opportunity of obſerving its

Digitized by Google

operation, could ſcarcely be able to form any conception of its influence. I have known a perſon who poſſeſſed a naturally good underſtanding, thrown into no ſmall perturbation of mind, by a ſervant having ſpilt a little ſalt, or carried ſomething out of the houſe on a particular morning before any thing was brought in, an overſight, which was ſuppoſed to prognoſticate a diſadvantageous run of buſineſs, and a diminution of property, in the courſe of the enſuing year. There is, indeed, ſcarcely any occurrence ſo trivial that ſuperſtition may not convert into either a good or an evil omen; but the fears of mankind multiply the prognoſtics of evil in far greater proportion than thoſe of good. This, indeed, is not ſurpriſing; for ſuperſtition is at once the parent and offspring of fear. It originates in that gloomy apprehenſiveneſs of futurity, which is natural to weak and uncultivated minds, and it nouriſhes and keeps alive thoſe fears from which it derives its exiſtence. Their influences are reciprocal, and by their mutual operation they acquire an aſcendancy over the mind, which it is almoſt impoſſible to eradicate. When ſuperſtition has eſtabliſhed its tyranny over the underſtanding, every

Digitized by Google

mode of reaſoning is ineffectual when employed to rectify its errors, and every argument inſufficient to produce conviction.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XII.

ON GHOSTS AND APPARITIONS.

"Mean while the village rouſes up the fire;
"While well atteſted, and as well believed,
"Heard ſolemn, goes the goblin ſtory round;
"Till ſuperſtitious horror creeps o'er all."

THOMSON.

OF all the various ramifications of popular ſuperſtition, the moſt remarkable and the moſt general is the belief of the reality of apparitions. This is almoſt univerſal, and it is not a little ſurpriſing that a notion ſo abſurd ſhould have prevailed in all ages, and in all countries, and that neither the dictates of reaſon, the light of philoſophy, nor the power of religion, has yet been able to deſtroy its influence. The moſt ridiculous and incredible tales, relative to this ſubject, have been told and believed; and it is only the enlightened few in every country, who have the good ſenſe to laugh at thoſe abſurdities which diſgrace the human underſtanding. Among the numerous catalogues of thoſe ſtories, there are ſome few ſo plauſibly related, and apparently

Digitized by Google

ſo well atteſted, that their claims to authenticity ſeem indiſputable to thoſe who relate, and thoſe who hear them; and ſuch perſons as are not endowed with this eaſy credulity, are ſtigmatized by the narrators and their credulous hearers, with the imputation of obſtinacy and almoſt of infidelity, as is if the vagaries of ſuperſtition were neceſſary appendages to religion. This aſſertion is grounded on experience; for I myſelf, have, oftener than once, had the opportunity of obſerving what ſort of opinion ſome perſons formed of my religious principles, when I could not refrain from laughing at ſtories of which the credibility was not leſs incompatible with religion, than with philoſophy and ſound reaſon, but which they thought it criminal to diſbelieve.

The doctrine of ghoſts and apparitions, like all other popular ſuperſtitions, when contemplated with the eye of reaſon, merit only to be treated with ridicule, comtempt, and diſregard; but when we conſider its aſtoniſhing influence over the minds of the vulgar, and even of ſome who would ſcarcely be willing to be included in that deſcription, it becomes a ſubject of ſerious conſideration, and claims an enquiry into its orign and its grounds, as well as

Digitized by Google

into the conſequences of ſuffering thoſe reveries of the imagination, to tyrannize over reaſon, and bewilder the underſtanding.* If apparitions be real, they muſt proceed either from a natural or a ſupernatural cauſe, and conſequently muſt be conſidered in both a philoſophical and a religious point of view.

In a philoſophical examination, no argument can be adduced that tends, in the leaſt, to eſtabliſh their probability. To inveſtigate the matter, we muſt firſt endeavour to form a juſt conception of the nature of the human ſoul, and conſider, whether after death and interment, any thing remain of man that can be viſible to mortal eyes, or in other words, whether the ſoul be material or immaterial. We know that the body is depoſited in the grave, and can no more be ſeen; the poſſibility, therefore, of the apparition of deceaſed perſons depends ſolely on the nature of the ſoul or ſpirit. If this be material, the ſubſtance, of which it is compoſed, muſt be exceedingly fine and ſubtle, and its viſibility extremely improbable, although, perhaps, not abſolutely impoſſible. Philoſophy, however, in

* Some inſtances, unfortunately too public to be unknown, and too recent to be forgotten, prove the fatal conſequences of theſe ſuperſtitions.

Digitized by Google

this reſpect, ſanctioned and confirmed by religion, teaches us that the ſoul is altogether immaterial; and it is evident, that a being purely immaterial and intellectual, cannot act upon the optics ſo as to render itſelf viſible to the corporeal eye.

That great moral philoſopher and elegant writer, Dr. Johnſon, appears to have fallen into a ſort of inconſiſtency of reaſoning, in the ſpeeches which he puts into the mouth of Imlac, preceptor and guide to Raſſelas; and it muſt be obſerved, that the notions and ſentiments attributed to the Abyſſinian ſage, are thoſe of the Doctor himſelf. "That the dead are ſeen no more," ſaid Imlac, "I will not undertake to maintain againſt the concurrent teſtimony of all ages, and of all nations. There is no people, rude or learned, among whom apparitions of the dead are not related and believed. This opinion, which, perhaps, prevails as far as human nature is diffuſed, could become univerſal only by its truth: thoſe that never heard of one another, would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience could make credible. That it is doubted by ſingle cavillers, can very little weaken the general evidence; and ſome, who deny it with their tongues,

Digitized by Google

confeſs it by their fears." Imlac, however, in his diſcourſe on the nature of the ſoul, labours to eſtabliſh the opinion of its immateriality, and enforces the belief of this doctrine by a train of cloſe and logical reaſoning. "Some," anſwered Imlac, "have indeed ſaid, that the ſoul is material, but I can ſcarcely believe that any man has thought it who knew how to think; for all the concluſions of reaſon enforce the immateriality of mind, and all the notices of ſenſe, and inveſtigations of ſcience, concur to prove the unconſciouſneſs of matter."

Imlac contends for the reality of apparitions, from the concurrent teſtimony of all ages and nations, and the univerſal belief of all mankind. This univerſality of belief, however, does not appear to have exiſted except among the vulgar, and it is evident, that the concurrent teſtimony here mentioned is to be drawn only from that claſs. Neither ſacred nor profane hiſtory informs us that the diſtinguiſhed characters of ancient and modern times, even when in the moſt trying and difficult ſituations, and engaged in the moſt important affairs, had any apparitions of departed ſouls either to terrify, encourage, or inſtruct them. The

Digitized by Google

ſovereigns of nations, and commanders of armies, on whom the deſtiny of millions depended, were never favoured with a viſit from their departed anceſtors or counſellors, for the ſalutary purpoſe of directing their conduct, or warning them of impending dangers. If the appearance of ghoſts had been any thing more than mere fiction, there is the ſtrongeſt reaſon to believe, that the hiſtories of both the ancient and modern world would have been crowded with well-authenticated relations of that kind. When we conſider the incalculable number of perſons, of all deſcriptions, ſuddenly cut off by diſeaſe or accident, of Princes and Generals who have fallen in battle, or by aſſaſſination, on the eve of carrying into execution the greateſt and moſt important deſigns, and left their projects unaccompliſhed, and their undertakings unfiniſhed, it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that apparitions would have been extremely frequent, and that ſo many human ſouls being thus violently, and often inſtantaneouſly ſeparated from their bodies, in the midſt of ſuch intereſting ſcenes, and in ſo critical a ſituation of their affairs, a great number of them would have returned upon earth, and preſented themſelves to thoſe perſons with whom they were, by their public or private concerns, intimately connected, and united in

Digitized by Google

one common cauſe. Among ſo many aſſaſſinated Roman Emperors, and other murdered monarchs, we do not find that any of them ever appeared again upon earth, either to intereſt themſelves in the affairs of the nations they had governed, or to haunt their murderers; yet we hear numberleſs tales of old women, &c. overleaping the bounds of their eternal manſions, and coming to teaze and terrify their neighbours, by exhibiting themſelves arrayed in white, and ſometimes without a head, making ſtrange noiſes in the night, gliding over their chamber floors, drawing their curtains, pulling away their pillows, and a thouſand ſuch miſchievous gambols, and all this in ſport, merely to amuſe themſelves with the fears of thoſe whom they had left behind. Conſider and compare thoſe caſes, and it will plainly appear, that although the reality of apparitions may have conſtituted, and undoubtedly ſtill conſtitutes an article of the creed of the weak and ignorant, in every country, it has never been believed among the wiſe and enlightened in any part of the world.

Those, whoſe minds are illumined by philoſophy and literature, and have generally aſſo-

Digitized by Google

ciated with perſons of the ſame deſcription, will perhaps ſay, "what need is there now of a diſſertation on this ſubject. Theſe tales, it is true, have been related by antiquated nurſes; but who, in this age, believes them?" Who believes them! many thouſands in this enlightened age, and in this enlightened country, believe them as firmly as the beſt chriſtian believes the goſpel. And a ſerious conſideration of the dreadful conſequences of this credulity, exhibited in many notorious inſtances, will authoriſe us to conclude, that whoever could eradicate ſuperſtition from the minds of men, might be deſervedly ranked among the benefactors of the human ſpecies.

If Dr. Johnſon's Imlac had well conſidered his arguments in favour of the immateriality of the ſoul, he would have ſeen their evident tendency to diſprove his hypotheſis of the reality of apparitions of the dead; for nothing can be more incompatible with ſound philoſophy, than that a being purely immaterial can by any phyſical cauſes become viſible to the corporeal optics, or act in any manner whatever upon the organs of any body, except that which is, by the laws of nature, united to it, and together with it, conſtitutes one indentical perſon.

Digitized by Google

As no arguments whatever can be deduced from philoſophy, in favour, even of the probable reality of apparitions, it will be requiſite to conſider them in a religious point of view, and to enquire whether an opinion ſo contradictory to reaſon be authoriſed by revelation.

Many perſons are ſo far miſled by ſuperſtition, as to imagine that a diſbelief of apparitions is a mark of impiety and irreligion. Thoſe, when they have heard the ſubject fully examined, and their favorite opinion combated by the moſt convincing arguments, that the dictates of reaſon and the inveſtigations of philoſophy can furniſh, cloſe the diſcuſſion with this expreſſive and impoſing concluſion, "Nothing is impoſſible to God." This overbearing declaration, which appears at the firſt ſight to ſilence diſpute, and to preclude all poſſibility of reply, involves a train of reaſoning extremely erroneous; for every thing is impoſſible to the Divine Being that is contrary to his nature and his attributes. Let not vain and ignorant man arrogantly preſume to circumſcribe the agency of his Creator; but to aſſert that he cannot act in a manner that is inconſiſtent with his infinite perfections, involves no pretention to a limitation of his power. Infinite goodneſs is his attribute, he cannot

Digitized by Google

therefore do any thing that is unjuſt or wicked. He is infinitely wiſe, and conſequently it is impoſſible to him to act unwiſely. If apparitions of the dead do not proceed from cauſes purely natural, they muſt, whenever they happen, be attributed to the particular command or permiſſion of the Creator of the human ſoul, the Sovereign Ruler of the Univerſe, whoſe power extends equally over the intellectual as over the material world. This conſideration naturally excites us to enquire what circumſtances can authoriſe man to ſuppoſe the particular interpoſition of the divine agency. If we reaſon according to thoſe ideas of infinite wiſdom, which ſound philoſophy and true religion teach us to form, we ſhall readily conclude that no apparition, nor any other miraculous event produced by a ſupernatural agency can take place, except on great and important occaſions. This ought to be a general rule of reaſoning in theſe caſes; and indeed its univerſality and invariability appear to be ſuch, that our ideas of the divine attributes do not ſuffer us to ſuppoſe that it can admit of any exception. The learned Pagans were ſo fully ſenſible of this, that even in their poetical compoſitions, in which the interference of ſuperior beings, with human affairs, was frequently introduced, they made it a fixed and

Digitized by Google

invariable rule, that the agency of thoſe beings ought not to be ſuppoſed, except when the magnitude of the event, or the importance and difficulty of the criſis ſanctioned the probability of ſuch a ſuppoſition. This Pagan maxim is not unworthy the attention of chriſtians. The ſyſtem of polytheiſm, however, the mythologies of different nations might vary from one another, uniformly taught the doctrine of a number of ſubordinate deities, governing the world under the controul of one ſupreme and univerſal being; and theſe inferior divinities being ranged in a long line of ſubordination, ſome more and others leſs exalted above human nature, their different departments and offices ſo varied and multiplied, and often ſo cloſely connected with human affairs, might induce a ſuppoſition of their particular interference in the concerns of mortals. This phantaſmagoria of an ideal world, furniſhed a grand machinery for the embelliſhment of poetical compoſition, not intended as a repreſentation of truth, but calculated to ſtrike the imagination, and command attention. To introduce a ſuperior agent upon a trifling occaſion, however, appeared even to their poets ſuch an infringement of the laws of reaſon and propriety, as to be inadmiſſible, even in fictitious repreſentation, in which the imagination was ſuffered to range

Digitized by Google

as far as the utmoſt limits of probability. We believe in one Supreme, eternal, and infinitely perfect Being, who created the world, and governs it without any delegation of power, pervading every part of the immenſe ſyſtem, and ruling the whole by immutable laws. It is therefore the extreme of abſurdity to ſuppoſe him liable to caprice who has eſtabliſhed all regular order. It is impoſſible that infinite wiſdom ſhould ever act capriciouſly, nor can we ſuppoſe that he ſhould ever alter or annul the eternal laws, which he has, in his omniſcience eſtabliſhed, unleſs it be, when the object in ſome degree merits his particular interpoſition, and the action appears worthy of the agent. In ſuch caſes, the divine agency being conſiſtent with the divine attributes, will always be conſpicuous and unequivocal, not obſcure and indiſtinguiſhable, majeſtically great, not abſurd and trifling.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XIII.

ON THE SAME.

THE DOCTRINE OF APPARITIONS EXAMINED FROM THE AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

THE annals of the world do not furniſh one well authenticated inſtance of any particular and preternatural agency of the Supreme Being, except on extraordinary occaſions, and for extraordinary purpoſes. The ſacred ſcriptures, which are peculiarly the hiſtory of God's particular and extraordinary diſpenſations to man, do not furniſh one inſtance of divine interpoſition, or particular communication, except when the occaſion was ſuch as eminently required ſuch an agency. We find ſome diſtinguiſhed perſons, whom the Almighty had ſelected from the maſs of mankind, to act ſome conſpicuous part in the great plan of his Providence, favoured by a particular interpoſition of his power, and a particular communication of

Digitized by Google

his will; but whenever this was done, a ſupernatural agency was clearly perceptible, and the purpoſe fully explained, either immediately, as in the viſions of Abraham, Jacob, Moſes, &c. or ſhortly after, as in the caſe of the dreams of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, &c. Theſe were very different from our popular tales of apparitions, where neither plan nor purpoſe can be diſcovered, but all is trifling, improbable, and abſurd.

The viſions of the firſt patriarchs were deſigned to ſhew them the future deſtiny of a great nation that was to be formed out of their poſterity, and diſtinguiſhed by particular diſpenſations of Providence. The dreams of Pharaoh were communications, made to the ſovereign of the moſt opulent and poliſhed nation of that early period, for the great purpoſes of warning him to make a timely proviſion for the ſupport of his own numerous ſubjects, and alſo of ſtrangers, when Egypt and all the neighbouring countries were about to ſuffer the calamities of a long and grievous famine, as well as of raiſing Joſeph from the obſcurity of a priſon to the adminiſtration of the kingdom, and of introducing the Iſraelites into Egypt. The object of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams was not only

Digitized by Google

to effect the promotion of Daniel, the chosen servant of God, but also to show to an ambitious founder of a potent empire the short duration of his monarchy, and his own insignificancy in respect of the Universal Monarch. The remarkable prodigy exhibited to Belshazzar, the last of the Babylonian Kings, was a denunciation of the divine vengeance against an impious and sacrilegious Prince, who was, at that very moment, with a madness scarcely paralleled in the annals of human infatuation, indulging in the most flagrant acts of impiety, as well as of licentiousness; when an implacable enemy, who had annihilated his armies by successive defeats, had, notwithstanding the strength of the walls in which the improvident monarch placed his confidence, already found means to enter the city; and when the hand-writing appeared on the wall, was hastening to the royal palace to exterminate the devoted Prince, with his debauched courtiers. In all these prodigies we see an evident and unequivocal effect of supernatural agency, a distinct and connected plan, and a grand and luminous display of the Divine Providence.

Digitized by Google

All the other inſtances in the old teſtament, of extraordinary communications, made by the Supreme Being to man, during a period of about three thouſand five hundred years, are in all the material points ſimilar to the few here adduced. All were made for ſome great and important purpoſe, and were conducive to ſome great and important end. In all of them a preternatural agency is conſpicuous and unequivocal, and the purpoſe expreſsly declared, or in ſome manner clearly revealed. All theſe ſupernatural communications, if brought forward to diſtinct inſpection, will appear eſſentially connected with the univerſal and uninterrupted ſeries of cauſes and effects employed by the Almighty Ruler, for the completion of his extenſive and myſterious plan. Nothing of the kind can be diſcovered in the tales of popular ſuperſtition, in which every thing is without connexion or coherence, incapable of any rational or appropriate application, being equally abſurd in their contexture, and inſignificant in their effects.

It is eſpecially to be obſerved throughout the whole of the ſcriptures, that ſupernatural communications are never repreſented as made through the medium of apparitions of the dead, but ſometimes by dreams, ſtrongly and

Digitized by Google

unequivocally marked with the characteriſtics of a celeſtial agency, and ſometimes by a divine impulſe on the mind of a perſon receiving a heavenly commiſſion, relative to ſome extraordinary diſpenſation of Providence, or at leaſt to ſome great and important event; and this is commonly expreſſed in ſcriptural phraſeology, by ſaying, "the word of the Lord came unto him". When theſe communications were made by viſions, the miniſtry of angels was employed, and not that of departed ſouls. This involves an irrefragable argument againſt the belief of apparitions of the dead. If theſe could have taken place by natural means, if it had been a prerogative of departed ſpirits to reviſit this tranſitory ſcene, it may reaſonably be preſumed that Abraham, or ſome other of the patriarchs, would have paid a viſit to their diſconſolate poſterity when groaning under Egyptian ſervitude; or when, in later times, their deviation from the pure worſhip of the God of their fathers was about to bring upon them the moſt dreadful calamities. It might, on equal grounds, be ſuppoſed that Moſes would, at ſome time or other have appeared, to direct by his counſels, or check by his reproofs, the conduct of the people whoſe leader and legiſlator he had been, and whoſe welfare had, during his life, been ſo much

Digitized by Google

the object of his efforts and attention. On the ſame principle, it would appear ſurpriſing that the ghoſt of David never appeared to his ſon Solomon, to reprove his licentiouſneſs, nor the ghoſt of the wife Solomon to his imprudent ſon and ſucceſſor, Rehoboam; that none of the pious Kings of Judah appeared after death, to expoſtulate with their wicked ſucceſſors, and eſpecially that none of them reviſited Jeruſalem, in the reign of Zedekiah, to warn their deſcendants and the nation of the dreadful misfortune that awaited them. Supernatural communications were, indeed, made on moſt of theſe occaſions; but they were made through the medium of a prophetic miſſion, and not by any apparitions of the deceaſed patriarchs, kings, or prophets of Iſrael. If the apparition of departed ſpirits can proceed from natural cauſes, or if the Supreme Ruler of the viſible and the inviſible world had, in the extraordinary communications of his will to mortals, thought fit to make uſe of their miniſtry, ſome of the deceaſed princes or prophets would, out of compaſſion, have reviſited the ſinful and ſuffering nation; and the ſcriptures, undoubtedly, would not have been ſilent on the ſubject. If, in circumſtances ſo critical, and on occaſions ſo extremely important, the ſpirits of none of theſe diſtinguiſhed perſonages ever made their

Digitized by Google

appearance, the ſuppoſition of a preternatural agency exerciſed in ſending ſuch apparitions to affright boys, girls, and old women, or men whoſe minds are as weak as theirs, is a burleſque on human reaſon, an abſurdity for which language can ſcarcely furniſh an appropriate name.

The only inſtance, in the old teſtament, that can be adduced in oppoſition to theſe remarks, is the apparition of the ghoſt of Samuel, raiſed by the witch of Endor. This extraordinary relation is of ſo myſterious a nature, that much doubt and controverſy has ariſen on the ſubject. Some have been inclined to think that it was not Samuel, but an evil ſpirit in his likeneſs that made its appearance. This opinion, which is founded on the ſuppoſition, that the ſpirit of ſo great and ſo good a man could not be ſubject to the commands of a wicked enchantreſs, is far from being deſtitute of probability. However, it is on the other hand to be obſerved, that the ſorcereſs herſelf, was both ſurpriſed and affrighted when ſhe perceived the apparition, and plainly teſtified that ſhe ſaw ſomething that ſhe did not expect; and whatever it was, it aſſumed the appearance and character of Samuel, and ſpoke to Saul in his name. This has induced many to believe that it was Samuel himſelf.

Digitized by Google

Without, however, pretending to unravel the myſtery, or to decide the queſtion, it is ſufficient to obſerve, that the prophet cannot be ſuppoſed to have appeared in conſequence of the incantations of the ſorcereſs, but by a command from the Moſt High, in order to announce to a wicked Prince his approaching deſtruction, and the tranſlation of the kingdom of Iſrael to another family. In this caſe, therefore, of ſupernatural agency, we diſcover an object worthy of the miracle, and perceive that the event which the apparition predicted, was both of great importance, and in cloſe connexion with the other parts of the great plan of Divine Providence, reſpecting the Iſraelitiſh nation. It is alſo to be conſidered, that although the general authenticity of the ſcriptural hiſtory, as well as of the ſcriptural doctrines be univerſally ackowledged, yet it is not impoſſible that a ſingle inſulated fact like this, in ſo tumultuous and critical a ſituation of affairs, might be miſrepreſented, or pehaps interpolated, eſpecially as it relates to one of its darkeſt periods. However this may be, the exiſtence of one ſingle ſolitary inſtance of this kind, in the long period of almoſt four thouſand years, muſt be regarded as a circumſtance which deviates not leſs from the ordinary courſe of providence, than from the regular laws of nature.

Digitized by Google

If the old teſtament exhibit no more than this ſingle and equivocal inſtance of the appearance of a departed ſpirit, the new teſtament is not more fertile in relations of this nature. The ſingle viſion of Moſes and Elias, talking with Jeſus, at the time of his transfiguration, upon Mount Tabor, is the only circumſtance of the kind recorded in the hiſtory of Chriſt and his apoſtles; and it muſt be conſidered, that he who was the creator of Moſes and Elias, might, if he pleaſed to aſſociate theſe, his dignified ſervants, in that myſterious manifeſtation of his glory, call their immortal ſpirits from their eternal manſions, and render them viſible to the eyes of the aſtoniſhed apoſtles, by the ſame Almighty fiat which at firſt ſpoke them into exiſtence.

The repeated apparitions of Chriſt to his diſciples after his reſurrection, certainly will not be conſidered as any exception to the general theory, nor as any proof of the viſible appearance of departed ſpirits. He had then triumphed over the grave, and his ſoul had reſumed its corporeal veſture. During the ſpace of time that his body and ſoul were in a ſtate of ſeparation, and the former depoſited in the tomb, the latter never made its appearance. Had he, even

Digitized by Google

during that period, appeared in order to conſole his dejected followers, overwhelmed with grief, agitated with fears, and perplexed with doubts, their critical and diſtreſſing ſituation would have evidently ſhown the purpoſe of ſuch an inſtance of ſupernatural power, and exhibited an unequivocal proof of its propriety and importance; neither could ſuch an impreſſion, made on their optics, have been an act of any difficulty to him who created the eye and the intellect of man, and poſſeſſes an unlimited controul over univerſal nature.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XIV.

ON THE SAME.

IN regard to the appearance of goblins, ſpectres, &c. which, by the vulgar, are ſuppoſed to be a ſpecies of evil ſpirits that walk in the dark, and terrify poor mortals, the very ſame arguments may be adduced, both from reaſon and ſcripture, againſt apparitions of this kind, as againſt thoſe of departed ſouls. The light of philoſophy, and the light of religion, equally tend to diſſipate thoſe chimeras of the imagination; in this reſpect, theſe two great luminaries of the human mind exactly coincide, as, indeed, they always do, when rightly underſtood. Philoſophy informs us that an immaterial being cannot, without a miracle, be viſible to mortal eyes; and both reaſon and revelation teach us that it is inconſiſtent with the nature of the Supreme Being, and derogatory to his glory, to alter the eſtabliſhed laws of nature for trifling and capricious purpoſes.

Digitized by Google

These ſuperſtitious notions appear to be relics of Paganiſm, which their congeniality, with the excurſive vagrancy of the human imagination, unreſtrained by reaſon, ſeconded by the gloomy apprehenſions of ignorance, unenlightened by philoſophy, has, through ſucceſſive generations, tranſmitted to poſterity. All theſe abſurdities might originate from Pagan ideas; they are in perfect uniſon with that ſyſtem, and may be traced to that ſource.

The Pagan mythology, among the crowd of its ſubaltern deities, recognized a number of beings of an inferior order, called demons or genii. Some of theſe were of a benevolent, others of a malevolent nature, and, conſequently, were diſtinguiſhed by the denominations of good and evil genii. The Pagan mythology had never defined the nature and eſſence of its divinities; all the explanations that can be found relative to the ſubject, are the private opinions of their philoſophers. As they were creatures of the imagination, this queſtion was left to its deciſion; and the philoſophers themſelves, who held the doctrine of polytheiſm in ſubordination to theiſm, could not agree in their opinions concerning the ſubſtance of which their Gods were formed. However, as a being

Digitized by Google

purely immaterial appears difficult to human comprehenſion, it ſeems to have been the general opinion, even of the philoſophical part of the Pagan world, that the ſubſtance of thoſe ſubaltern deities was pure ætherial matter, too rarified and ſubtle to be viſible to mortal ſight, unleſs it was their pleaſure to exhibit themſelves in a particular manner by their ſupernatural power. It is reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the ideas of the vulgar on theſe ſubjects were ſtill more groſs. The ſuppoſed exiſtence of demons or genii, inferior in power and excellence to the Gods, and alſo compoſed of a groſſer ſubſtance, was a fertile ſource of ſuperſtition; and we find in the fabulous hiſtories of antiquity, ſome relations of the apparitions of thoſe inferior beings. Theſe, however, are only few in number, and do not appear to have been much credited, except among the vulgar, the ſuperſtitious, and the ignorant. The celebrated viſion of Brutus, who is ſaid to have ſeen an apparition, aſſuming the title of his evil genius, and predicting his defeat at Phillippi, was diſbelieved by Caſſius, who very rationally attributed the circumſtance to the diſtempered imagination of Brutus, and the agitation of a mind exhauſted with fatigue, want of ſleep, and intenſe application. If it be true that Brutus really did imagine that he ſaw

Digitized by Google

a ſpectre, the agitated and exhauſted ſtate of his mental faculties, was undoubtedly the cauſe which gave riſe to the phantaſm that was formed in his imagination; and if his ſubſequent defeat and death had not realized his apprehenſions, and given weight to the ſtory, it would never have been regarded either by himſelf or his hiſtorians.

The cauſe aſſigned by Caſſius for this illuſory appearance, ſhows that he had very juſt notions concerning the formation of ſuch phantaſms in the mind, and that the philoſophical Pagans of antiquity were not ignorant that they have no exiſtence, but in the diſordered imagination of thoſe who fancy they ſee them. It muſt, however, be granted, that thoſe appearances may ſometimes and in ſome meaſure proceed from a cauſe purely natural, that of viſual deception. We judge of diſtance only by experience, and our ideas of magnitude are regulated by thoſe of diſtance. When, therefore, we judge of objects ſolely by the image which they form in the eye, without conception of their diſtance, we muſt neceſſarily be deceived in regard to their ſize; and in travelling in the night, we are liable to miſtake a buſh near at hand, for a tree at a diſtance, or the reverſe. If, in like manner, we cannot diſtinguiſh objects by their form, we

Digitized by Google

muſt unavoidably err in judging of their diſtance and magnitude. From this circumſtance, M. de Buffon ſuppoſes that the tales of ſpectres and figures of a gigantic and hideous form, which ſome pretend to have ſeen originate. That celebrated naturaliſt therefore rejects the opinion that they exiſt ſolely in the imagination, and thinks it probable, that they might, in conſequence of a deception of viſion, have appeared to the eye in every reſpect as they have been deſcribed, ſince every one who has travelled much in the night, eſpecially in places where he was not perfectly acquainted with the objects which conſtitute the landſcape, and conſequently was unable to judge of their diſtance, muſt have obſerved how much the eye is liable to be deceived in reſpect of ſize and form. When the ſpectator, equally incapable of diſtinguiſhing what he ſees, and of aſcertaining the diſtance at which he ſees it, can form no judgment of the object, except from the angle which it forms from the eye, he will find it magnified in proportion to its proximity, and in approaching it will often find its ſize ſtupendouſly increaſed. In perceiving this, he will naturally be aſtoniſhed, and probably terrified, until, on a nearer approach, he is able to diſtinguiſh its form; and then the uncertainty of the diſtance vaniſhes, and the magnitude

Digitized by Google

appears ſuch as it is in reality. If, on the other hand, he be afraid to approach it, and fly from the place without examining the object of his terror, the only idea he will have of that which had preſented itſelf to his view, will be that of the image it had formed in his eye, the image of a figure gigantic in ſize and horrible in its form. On theſe grounds, M. de Buffon contends "that the popular prejudice, in regard to ſpectres, &c. originates from the nature of viſion, and that ſuch appearances do not, as other philoſophers ſuppoſe, exiſt ſolely in the imagination."

Although the whole of this repreſentation be perfectly conſiſtent with the experience and obſervations of every one who has been accuſtomed to travel in the night, the concluſion drawn from it, by M. de Buffon, does not appear perfectly juſt. In all thoſe caſes, if imagination did not predominate over reaſon, if ſuperſtition did not overcloud the mind, thoſe objects, which, in the night, appear ſo diſtorted, would no more excite fear than a multitude of others often ſeen in the day, of which we do not know the nature, and by reaſon of diſtance, or ſome other circumſtance, cannot diſtinguiſh the form. On the contrary, they would, like unknown and ſtupendous objects, obſerved by day-light,

Digitized by Google

inſpire the mind with curioſity rather than terror, and excite us to examine rather than to avoid them. At leaſt we ſhould never ſuſpect them to be preternatural appearances, had not the imagination been, through the influence of ſuperſtition, accuſtomed to aſſociate the idea of a ſpectre with that of the darkneſs and ſilence of night, ſo that how much ſoever viſual deception may contribute to generate thoſe images in the mind, the radical cauſe exiſts in the imagination.

IGNORANCE, therefore, in conjunction with fear or melancholy, is the primary ſource from which ſpectres and apparitions derive their origin. The perſon whoſe nerves are ſtrong, whoſe mind is well informed, whoſe imagination is well regulated, and whoſe fears do not predominate over his reaſon, travels in the midnight gloom, as well as in the broad ſunſhine of noonday, without ever being troubled with ghoſts, ſpectres, hobgoblins, or any of the inhabitants of the inviſible world, whoſe names are found in the vocabulary of ignorance and ſuperſtition, and whoſe exploits terrify the imagination, and exerciſe the eloquence of nurſes and goſſips. The perſon whoſe conſcience reproaches him with atrocious criminality, although there is no

Digitized by Google

reaſon to ſuppoſe that he will ever be moleſted with real apparitions, may, indeed, form them in his imagination, and fancy that he ſees a phantom in every buſh. Fear is the companion of guilt; and conſcience, although it may ſleep for a time, at laſt awakes, often when leaſt expected; and it is frequently impoſſible to extinguiſh its power. To deliver the offender, whom human juſtice cannot diſcover nor puniſh, to the remorſe of conſcience, and the terrors of imagination, the moſt dreadful evils that human nature is capable of ſuffering, is a juſt puniſhment, inflicted by divine vengeance, on enormous guilt, a puniſhment, indeed, more to be dreaded than the gibbet, as it is far more terrible.

Those who dare not ſtir in the night, nor remain in ſolitude, through the fear of being viſited by an apparition, ought to aſk themſelves what they have in them ſo extraordinary, or ſo great, as to procure them the privilege of having an intercourſe with the inviſible world, of receiving miraculous communications, or experiencing the effects of a ſupernatural agency. If an individual would conſider what an inſignificant atom he is in the great maſs of rational exiſtence, he would ſee little in himſelf that could entitle him to theſe extraordinary diſtinctions.

Digitized by Google

THE conſequences of thoſe popular ſuperſtitions are, for the moſt part, exceedingly pernicious, and ſometimes unfortunately too notorious. They overwhelm reaſon, and obſcure the underſtanding. They render the mind ridiculouſly timid, warp it with prejudice, inſpire it with falſe and extravagant ideas, extinguiſh its energy, render it unfit for great undertakings, and even, ſometimes, diſqualify it for the common affairs of life. By their baleful influence on the mind, they ſometimes become pernicious to the body, and even hoſtile to the vital principle. In nervous habits particularly, this is very often the caſe; in conſtitutions inclined to melancholy, thoſe dreams of ſuperſtition are peculiarly and ſuperlatively dangerous. That diſeaſe has a natural tendency to engender thoſe chimæras, and is, at the ſame time, nouriſhed and fed by their operation on the mind. In certain circumſtances, their effects may be fatal. Perhaps no apology will be required for the introduction of a narrative not feigned for the ſake of embelliſhing the ſubject, or giving a falſe luſtre to reaſoning, but of which I myſelf can, not from hearſay or ſecond-hand report, but from perſonal knowledge, aſſert the authenticity. The circumſtance is indeed ſo remarkable, ſo peculiarly

Digitized by Google

ſtriking, and proves, in ſo demonſtrative a manner, the baleful effects of ſuperſtition on weak and uncultivated minds, that it merits particular attention, and will ſufficiently apologize for the prolixity of this diſſertation.

The ſubject of this narrative was a perſon of about thirty-five. He was a married man, and his family conſiſted of himſelf, his wife, and one ſon about nine years of age. His occupation was that of a labourer in huſbandry. In regard to his perſon, he was of an athletic make, of great ſtature and ſtrength; in theſe reſpects, indeed, he was ſuperior to moſt men in the neighbourhood. His conſtitution was apparently robuſt, and he had ſcarcely ever experienced any bodily indiſpoſition. In his temper and manners, he was boiſterous, overbearing, and inclined to be quarrelſome. Conſcious of his ſuperior ſtrength, he was ever ready to diſplay that ſuperiority, and not many of his neighbours were deſirous of engaging with him in a ſerious conteſt. He was, indeed, a true alehouſe hero, or village bully, and was perfectly qualified to ſupport that character.

The clerk of the pariſh being indiſpoſed, ſent this man in the night, after it had been

Digitized by Google

ſometime dark, to fetch from the church ſomething that he wanted. Having taken the key, he accordingly went; but as ſoon as he had entered the church, the ſolemn gloomineſs of the place excited in his mind terrific ideas, which he had not philoſophy to reſiſt, and which made an impreſſion that could not be removed. His uninſtructed mind ſunk under the terrors of his imagination, which had formed chimæras, ſuch as he himſelf could not deſcribe, although their operation was viſible to any perſon of the leaſt penetration. This mental agitation, produced by imaginary fears, ſunk into a fixed melancholy, accompanied with a firm perſuaſion that his diſſolution was faſt approaching; and his mind giving way to this impreſſion, it became every day ſtronger and more deeply rooted. During a conſiderable time, he grew daily more dejected, without any bodily indiſpoſition; but as the body cannot long retain its health and vigour under extreme dejection of mind, he began to grow languid, had no inclination to activity or amuſements, and at length the depreſſion of his ſpirits rendered him unable to follow his accuſtomed employment. His caſe then began to be a ſubject of general converſation in the neighbourhood, and gave riſe to a number of ſuperſtitious remarks and abſurd conjectures,

Digitized by Google

many of which coming to his ears, contributed to increaſe his melancholy; I had not then lived long in the pariſh, and although I knew the man perſonally, I had not any particular acquaintance with him. The ſingularity of the circumſtance, however, induced me to pay him a viſit. I found him in a ſtate of eaſy calm dejection: he ſeldom ſtirred out of doors, although he felt no bodily indiſpoſition, except a ſort of languor cauſed by the dejection of his mind, and gradually increaſed through want of exerciſe. I queſtioned him, particularly concerning every circumſtance of his caſe, and found him tolerably communicative and pleaſed with my company. I inquired into the paſt and preſent ſtate of his mind, the nature of his ideas and their aſſociations, his prejudices and the extent of his knowledge, and ſoon perceived that he was totally illiterate, and had never been accuſtomed to reflection, that the ſphere of his obſervation was very contracted, and his ideas conſequently few and ſimple: in a word, I found the ſtate of his intellects ſuch as I expected, and ſuch as it is commonly obſerved among perſons of the ſame claſs. I queſtioned him particularly on the notions he had fomerly entertained relative to ghoſts and apparitions. He ſaid that he had not been accuſtomed to be much abroad in the

Digitized by Google

night, that he ſhould never have liked to keep ſuch late hours as I frequently uſed, and that if he travelled ſo much in the night time he ſhould often be terrified, and aſked me if I was not ſometimes frightened. To this he addded, that he had heard ſo many ſtories of ghoſts and ſpectres related by creditable perſons, who were older and wiſer than himſelf, that he had never ſeriouſly doubted of their reality; and appeared ſomewhat ſurpriſed when I repreſented them as chimæras, and laboured to ſhew their fallacy. He told me that every body ſaid there certainly were ſuch things to be ſeen, and that excepting myſelf, he had ſcarcely ever known any perſon except the clergyman of the pariſh, and a diſſenting miniſter in the place where he was brought up, who diſbelieved the reality of apparitions, that he himſelf had never converſed with either of them on the ſubject, but that people ſaid they did not believe any thing of the kind, and that all the neighbourhood conſidered them as very obſtinate and ſelf-opinionated men, on account of their incredulity.

These declarations unravelled the whole myſtery, and I could ſee nothing extraordinary in a caſe, which to many ſeemed almoſt miraculous. I interrogated him very cloſely con-

Digitized by Google

cerning what he had ſeen in the church or the church-yard, and the manner in which his mind had been affected. Of theſe things he could give only a very imperfect and incoherent account, from which no ſatisfactory information could be collected. He ſaid that as he was going, a ſort of horror came over his mind, and that he was under ſome apprehenſion of ſeeing ſpectres about the church yard, that in opening the church door, he had the misfortune to extinguiſh his light, and the door hanging very looſe, immediately ſhut after him, that this circumſtance ſo increaſed his terror, as in a manner to paralize his mental faculties, and render him incapable of giving any rational or intelligible account of his ſtate. However, I readily perceived the whole truth of the matter to be, that he was ſtruck with a panic terror, which raiſed phantoms in his imagination, ſuch as he could neither at that moment repel, nor afterwards deſcribe.

Having procured from him all the information that he was able to give, and made, as I thought, a juſt eſtimation of his caſe, I adduced all the arguments I poſſibly could to diſſipate his melancholy, and diſpel his apprehenſions. He ſeemed to approve my reaſonings, and to be pleaſed

Digitized by Google

with my converſation. Before I left him, his ſpirits ſeemed much exhilerated, and he appeared deſirous that I would repeat my viſit. About a week after, I went again to ſee him, and found him pretty much in the ſame ſtate. My ſecond viſit had the ſame enlivening effect on his mind as the firſt; and afterwards I went frequently to ſee him. He always appeared pleaſed with my company, and re-animated by my converſation; and his wife, perceiving his ſpirits ſo much raiſed by my diſcourſe, requeſted me to go to paſs half an hour with him as often as I could make it convenient. Every interview ſeemed to have the ſame effect on his mind, but this effect was only tranſient; and after I left him he always ſunk into his former ſtate of dejection. The terrors of his imagination, and the gloomy apprehenſions which they had generated, had made too deep an impreſſion to be obliterated by reaſoning. The grand misfortune was, that he had no ſupport, no ſource of conſolation in himſelf. He had never been in the habit of thinking, nor accuſtomed to reflect on cauſes and effects; and when the arguments which ſeemed to convince his underſtanding had ceaſed to ſound in his ears, they alſo ceaſed to operate on his mind. Laborious employments having

Digitized by Google

been his ſole occupation, and bodily exerciſes, ſuch as wreſtling, and foot-ball playing, or elſe hard drinking, his only amuſements; their influence, and the whole tenor of his life had rendered him a ſtranger to thought and reflection. It was evident that his mind had received ſuch a ſhock as it was unable to ſupport, and of which, no train of reaſoning could then obviate the effects. Had he been fortunate enough to have met with ſome perſon of good ſenſe, whoſe arguments and inſtructions might have enlightened his underſtanding, before his diſtempered imagination had preyed on his nervous ſyſtem, to ſuch a degree, as to render him too weak and languid for the exerciſe of his ordinary employment, it is extremely probable, that thoſe chimæras might have been diſpelled. If the gloom of his mind had been only partially diſſipated before it reduced his body to a ſtate of languor, exerciſe and amuſements would, undoubtedly, have perfected the cure of this ſingular malady; but, unfortunately, no appropriate means had been uſed to illuminate and convince his underſtanding, until the terrors of his imagination had made an impreſſion too deep to be eraſed by argument, and his nervous ſyſtem had experienced a ſhock too ſevere to be repaired by medicine. In this ſtate, the ſettled

Digitized by Google

melancholy that preyed upon his mind, rapidly increaſed the languor of his body, and his bodily weakneſs thus continually increaſing, confirmed him in the opinion that his diſſolution was inevitable. The combination of theſe circumſtances, in fine, realized his apprehenſions. He continued two or three months gradually growing weaker, without any apparent change of ſymptoms, or any bodily pain, until at laſt, he ſunk into a ſtate of lethargic inſenſibility and calmly expired, falling in the very flower and vigour of his age a victim to imaginary terrors.

I have been the more particular in relating the circumſtances of this remarkable, although not ſingular caſe, both becauſe it fell within the ſphere of my own obſervation, and becauſe it exhibits in ſo ſtriking a manner the power of ſuperſtitious notions, and ideal terrors, over a weak and untutored intellect; from whence may be clearly perceived the great impropriety and pernicious effects of exciting ſuch images in the minds of children, when they are yet of an age too tender to be able to diſcover the fallacy of the tales they hear ſo often repeated. An eminent writer* ſays, "It is remarkable how

* Mr. Shenſtone.

Digitized by Google

much the belief of ghoſts and apparitions has loſt ground within theſe fifty years." This is certainly true. Stories of this kind are not ſo commonly related, nor ſo univerſally believed as they were fifty years ago; but yet the belief of the reality of apparitions is almoſt general among the vulgar. The affair I have juſt related, happened not quite thirty years ſince, and a number of more recent inſtances too plainly prove that this popular ſuperſtition is far from being yet eradicated.

Every parent and every perſon entruſted with the care of children, ought to endeavour to fortify their tender minds againſt thoſe abſurd and ſuperſtitious ideas. The tales of nurſes and old women ought never to be related in their hearing; but as it is generally impoſſible to prevent them from coming to their ears at one time or other, they ought to be exploded by every mode of argument, and treated with every mark of contempt. Stories of this kind, ſhould, at leaſt, never be mentioned in their hearing, but as ſubjects of ridicule; and every care ſhould be taken to excite them to laugh at the folly of thoſe who relate, and to pity the ignorance of thoſe who believe ſuch tales of terror.

Digitized by Google

IMAGINATION is in children, and, indeed, in all weak minds, ſtronger than reaſon, and the impreſſions it receives at an early period are not eaſily eradicated. I am, by ſome circumſtances of my childhood, qualified to ſpeak experimentally on the ſubject. While I was yet in the age of infancy, I went with my parents on a viſit to a friend's houſe, ſituated at ſome diſtance, and was left there to paſs a few weeks. During my reſidence there, the family was peſtered with the company and converſation of a lady who would have been dignified with the title of an old maid, had not a trifling overſight in her former days excluded her from the virtuous ſiſterhood. She was naturally fluent in converſation, her memory was wonderfully retentive, her imagination fertile in the invention and embelliſhment of the tales of ſuperſtition, and the reports of ſcandal; and as ſhe had been long verſed in the ſyſtem of goſſipping, ſhe poſſeſſed an inexhauſtible fund of matter for diſcourſe. She always procured the earlieſt intelligence of every young girl that happened a misfortune, of every married woman that chanced to make a ſlip, and of every ghoſt that returned to its former dwelling to plague and frighten the occupiers; and although her age was not quite fifty, ſhe perfectly knew and remembered all the occurrences of

Digitized by Google

thoſe kinds that had happened within the laſt forty years of that period. By this good lady, I was, during my reſidence in that place, ſo completely inſtructed in the whole ſyſtem of the inviſible world, that although I was not above nine years of age, there was little information to be had on the ſubject with which I was not already acquainted. Whether ſhe ſeriouſly believed all the ſtories ſhe related, or not, is what I cannot pretend to determine, but this I can poſitively ſay, that I believed every one of them, and the effect which I experienced from her eloquent narrations, was, that I ſcarcely durſt peep out of doors after it began to grow dark. The length of my active day was, in conſequence of her inſtructions very much abridged; for as ſhe had made the wonderful diſcovery that ghoſts and ſpectres begin to walk in the twilight as much as in "the ſolemn midnight hour," I uſed to be extremely terrified if at any time I was likely to be out of doors after it began to be in the leaſt duſky. It is difficult to conceive, and impoſſible to deſcribe the horrors which I ſometimes felt on theſe occaſions in that early period of life, when reaſon had not yet aſſumed the ſovereignty over imagination, ſo that ſpeaking not from conjecture but from experience, I can bear witneſs of the influence of ſuperſtition over

Digitized by Google

weak and uncultivated minds, and of the pernicious conſequences of ſuffering children to liſten to ſuch abſurdities without guarding them againſt thoſe ideal terrors. I believe it was not until I had attained my fifteenth year, that I ever heard the doctrine of ſpectres and apparitions ſeriouſly called in queſtion, or ever doubted of its credibility, but I was nearly eighteen before my mind was completely diveſted of the ſuperſtitious notions imbibed in my infantile years. And I cannot here omit making this important remark, that had I not poſſeſſed the advantage of a more philoſophical turn of mind, and better means of enlightening my underſtanding than many others have had, thoſe horrors of imagination would, in all probability, have accompanied me through life.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XV.

ON THE ARTS OF SORCERY, &c.

THE imaginary arts of witchcraft, necromancy, &c. with which the crafty have long amuſed fools, and by their pretenſions to occult ſcience impoſed on the ignorant and ſuperſtitious part of mankind, derive their origin from the ſame ſource as the belief of apparitions, owe their credit and ſupport to the ſame cauſes, and are exploded by the ſame arguments. No power in heaven, or on earth, can read the volume of futurity, except that Being to whom all futurity is preſent, who has created the world, and who, alone, knows what is to happen in it through the operation of thoſe laws which he has eſtabliſhed. The model of creation, both material, and intellectual, exiſted from all eternity in the divine mind, and in that model was neceſſarily included the whole train of mundane events. Created beings, of whatever order, human, or angelic, can by their nature, know, only the paſt and the preſent; this is the full extent of

Digitized by Google

finite penetration. Of the future they may, by experience and accurate obſervation of exiſting circumſtances, form probable conjectures, but can know with certainty only ſo much as he alone who ſees through all futurity may think fit to reveal; and he can leaſt of all be ſuppoſed to communicate this knowledge to thoſe who endeavour to acquire it by methods which he has condemned, and whoſe arts he has forbidden us to conſult.

The fallacious arts of magic and divination of every kind, as well as the tales of ghoſts and apparitions, are at this time ſo fully exploded among the enlightened and philoſophical part of mankind, that the laws formerly enacted againſt them are in moſt countries of Europe repealed, and the pretenders to them liable to be puniſhed only as impoſtors. However, notwithſtanding the improvement and illumination of the human mind, by the revival of learning, and the progreſs of ſcience, the vulgar, in moſt countries, who conſtitute a vaſt majority of mankind, ſtill believe the reality and truth of thoſe various modes of devination; and there is ſcarcely a city, town, or village, in this enlightened kingdom, which does not exhibit frequent inſtances of this kind of ſuperſtitious credulity.

Digitized by Google

FROM the repeated prohibitions of the arts of ſorcery and divination contained in the ſcriptures, and the ſeverity of the Moſaical law againſt thoſe who exerciſed them, many intelligent perſons ſuppoſe that the profeſſors of thoſe occult ſciences had, in reality, the power of foretelling future events. This, however, appears to be an egregious miſtake; for in many parts we find that the prophets of the Almighty challenge the aſtrologers, the ſoothſayers, the diviners, &c. to foretel the things that are to come, and warn the people of the fallacy of their predictions. It appears upon the whole, that the diviners of ancient days were nothing more than miſtaken enthuſiaſts, or deſigning impoſtors, like the pretenders of the ſame deſcription in modern times. The reaſon why thoſe arts were ſo ſtrictly forbidden by the Moſaical law, and ſo uniformly condemned in the ſcripture, is ſufficiently obvious. They were a branch of Paganiſm, a ſcene of impoſture, a burleſque upon reaſon, and a nurſery of ſuperſtition. By impoſing on the minds of the ignorant, they were a breach of morality, and an offence againſt ſociety, and by encouraging a criminal curioſity of inveſtigating futurity, and of diſcovering what could not be diſcovered, they had an evident tendency not only to deceive and obſcure the

Digitized by Google

the underſtanding, but alſo to diminiſh that confidence which man ought always to place in the Omnipotent and Omniſcient Ruler of the Univerſe, who governs all in the beſt and wiſeſt manner, who makes all his creatures the ſubjects of his attention, and from whoſe eternal preſcience no future event can be concealed. All thoſe arts of divination were in cloſe connexion with the religious ideas and worſhip of the Pagans, and conſequently had a ſtrong tendency to withdraw the Iſraelites from the obſervance of their law, and lead them to idolatry. This was an obvious and weighty reaſon for the ſeverity of the Jewiſh law againſt this ſyſtem of Pagan impoſture, and the marked diſapprobation of it ſo uniformly viſible in the ſcriptures.

The ſacred writings uniformly condemn every mode of inveſtigating futurity, except by the common rules of human prudence, and the rational operation of the underſtanding, in calculating the future effects of preſent exiſting cauſes, and forming probable conjectures from viſible circumſtances; but they are very far from repreſenting the arts of divination as means whereby any future events can be known. On the contrary, the whole train of thoſe pre-

Digitized by Google

tended ſciences are always ridiculed in the ſcriptures as illuſory and fallacious, as the vagaries of imagination, or the ſchemes of impoſture. The pretenders to them are frequently challenged to give evidence of their ſkill, and in particular, thoſe of Babylon, the place where thoſe arts were the moſt ſtudied, and where they flouriſhed with the greateſt eclat, are, as already obſerved, openly and in direct terms called upon to declare whether they could, by their ſcience, foreſee the calamities that were ſhortly to fall upon their Empire, their city, and themſelves.

If the magicians of Egypt performed or ſeemed to perform by their enchantments ſome extraordinary things, there is no doubt but they produced thoſe effects by their knowledge of ſome ſecrets of natural philoſophy, or probably by cunning deception, or the art of legerdemain, like the jugglers of the preſent day, who, by mere ſlight of hand, often do things that aſtoniſh the multitude, and which, to an ignorant obſerver, would ſeem almoſt impoſſible to be accompliſhed by mere natural means. Theſe tricks, however, appear perfectly ſimple to thoſe who underſtand the manner of their performance, and are extremely eaſy to thoſe who make the

Digitized by Google

exercise of them their employment. And it appears evident, from both sacred and profane history, that the jugglers of antiquity, especially those of Egypt and Babylon, were equal, or perhaps superior in skill and dexterity, to those of the present age.

When it is observed how much the operators of legerdemain, in our days, astonish a gaping crowd, and with what facility fortune-tellers, &c. impose on the ignorant populace, we shall not be much surprised at the credulity of ancient times. And when the influence of superstition in Great Britain is duly considered, we ought not to wonder that the magicians and diviners of Egypt and Babylon were able to to acquire wealth and pre-eminence, to command the veneration of the people, and gain an entire ascendency over minds clouded with ignorance, and led astray by an active and ardent imagination. The situation of Judea between these two great sources of Pagan imposture, and in the vicinity of other nations not less superstitious, with the propensity of the Israelites to these practices which so directly tended to the introduction of idolatry, are circumstances which clearly point out the political and moral reason why all the arts of divination were so strictly

Digitized by Google

prohibited in the Jewiſh law, and ſo condemned and ridiculed in the hagiographical writings, although it is ſufficiently evident that Moſes and the prophets of Iſrael regarded theſe things in the ſame light with the legiſlators and philoſophers of modern Europe.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XIV.

ON THE ESTIMATION OF CHARACTERS AND THEIR MODIFICATION BY CIRCUMSTANCES.

AS the public affairs of nations, the riſe, the proſperity, the decline and downfall of empires, and all thoſe diſtinguiſhed events which mark with diſcriminating periods the hiſtory of mankind, are regulated and determined by a ſeries of cauſes and effects, for the moſt part uncontroulable by human prudence, and before they take place often undiſcoverable by human foreſight; ſo are the private concerns of individuals over-ruled, their views directed, and their intereſts formed by circumſtances of which the arrangement has never been in their power. Few perſons have had the opportunity of chooſing their own ſituations in life; ſtrictly ſpeaking, perhaps none have enjoyed this privilege. If they ſeem to exerciſe the prerogative of choice, they would, upon a cloſer inſpection, appear to act under the influence of preſent or pre-exiſting circumſtances, which they could not

Digitized by Google

alter, and by the impulſe of motives too powerful to be reſiſted, ſo that what is often called choice is in fact neceſſity. A perſon chuſes one handicraft employment preferably to another, or the profeſſion of huſbandry in preference to any of the mechanical arts; another drudges through the intricate mazes of the law; and others involve themſelves in the complicated ſpeculations of commerce, pore over the folios of the ledger, and make it their employment to balance the accounts of profit and loſs. It may be ſaid that although ſome of thoſe whoſe lives are employed in agricultural, mechanical, or mercantile occupations, have been, by a train of unavoidable circumſtances, fixed in their condition without any poſſibility of choice, yet many others have ſo far poſſeſſed the opportunity of chooſing for themſelves as to have had the liberty of embracing one profeſſion in preference to another; but it is evident that they were under the neceſſity of applying themſelves to ſome one among the variety that human circumſtances afford, and that if the direction of their conduct had been left wholly to their inclinations, they would ſcarcely have choſen any of the employments which they now exerciſe, or the ſtations which we now ſee them occupy. Few perſons would ſtand behind the compter, puzzle

Digitized by Google

their heads in the accompting-houſe, or drudge at the plough, few would handle the tools of the mechanic, or confine themſelves to the manufacturing loom, and as few would expoſe themſelves to the dangers of the ſeas or the horrors of war; if a combination of circumſtances, of which they never had the diſpoſal, did not imperiouſly compel them to engage in ſome of thoſe purſuits. The poor are impelled, by neceſſity, and the rich by motives equally irreſiſtible. The conduct of the former is determined by the indiſpenſible neceſſity of labouring for daily ſubſiſtence, and the latter act under the impulſe of a ſenſe of duty or parental affection, which ſtimulates them to exertion in order to make a reſpectable figure in life, and provide a decent and comfortable ſupport and eſtabliſhment for their families. The great are impelled by ſentiments of honour, or the deſire of glory, to occupy poſts of difficulty or danger, and to burthen themſelves with cares from which the affluence of their circumſtances might well exempt them; but which the public welfare of the community muſt impoſe on ſome of its members. The various circumſtances of human affairs furniſh the motives by which the purſuits of men are directed, their choice of occupation

Digitized by Google

determined, their energy excited, their conduct actuated, and their characters formed. By theſe impulſive ſprings, the immenſe and complicated machine of the moral world is put in motion, and all its wheels continued in their perpetual round. In this direction of human conduct the economy of Divine Providence is ſtrikingly diſplayed. In making the ſocial circumſtances of mankind direct their purſuits, and in cauſing partial views ultimately to redound to the general good, ſociety is confolidated, and public and private intereſts inſeparably united.

If indigence did not compel ſome to labour, the earth would be a deſert, and the human ſpecies would periſh. If the taſte for elegance and ſplendour among the opulent did not ſtimulate induſtry, the lower claſſes would be in a great meaſure deſtitute of employment, and conſequently of ſupport. And if the great were not impelled by a ſenſe of honour, or incited by the love of glory, to take upon them the adminiſtration of public affairs, it would neceſſarily fall into the hands of thoſe whoſe education and circumſtances diſqualify them for ſuch a charge, whoſe neceſſities would tempt them to venality, and the mediocrity of whoſe talents, and their want of penetration, would render them the dupes of impoſture.

Digitized by Google

It is evident, on the ſlighteſt inſpection of the moral world, that the ſphere of action of every individual is marked out, and his place in the general ſyſtem aſſigned him by the unerring providence of that being whoſe omniſcience enables him to combine partial evil with univerſal good. Every man is placed at the poſt he is to occupy in the centre of an aſſemblage of circumſtances, of which the complexity and various combinations alternately contract and extend, and ultimately limit his ſphere of action as well as his circle of obſervation, and not only determine his conduct, but alſo model his character.

From this view of human circumſtances, it is eaſy to perceive the abſurdity of treating with contempt, the employments, ſtudies, or purſuits of others, although different from thoſe in which we are occupied. If neceſſity has not impoſed them upon us, nor our choice adopted them, the caſe may be different with another perſon; and we ought neither to condemn his motives nor his conduct, unleſs the former be unjuſt, or the latter immoral. It is alſo to be obſerved, that his talents, although leſs ſplendid, may not be leſs uſeful: exterior brilliancy does not always imply

Digitized by Google

intrinſic value. In ſociety, every vocation has its uſe, and each tends to the harmony and conveniency of the whole. A perſon who does not ſit in the ſenate, nor command the armies of the ſtate, may perhaps manage well a farm, or carry on ſome uſeful and beneficial manufacture, and ſo contribute to the wealth and happineſs of the community; and one who cannot entertain us with inſtructive or amuſing converſation, may make a pair of good ſhoes, or weave a piece of good cloth.

That every one ſhould be wiſe and learned is as impoſſible as that every one ſhould be rich and great, both theſe ſuppoſitions are equally abſurd, equally inconſiſtent with the plan of Divine Providence, and incompatible with the eternal order of things. None ought, therefore, to be deſpiſed for caſual deficiencies. The man who cultivates well a farm, or ſkilfully conducts an extenſive mercantile concern, might have commanded an army, or governed an empire. The greateſt characters are not always placed in the higheſt ſituations; and many a poor labourer, or mechanic, with a proper education, would reflect luſtre on an univerſity, attract the attention of a ſenate, or command the applauſe of a ſociety of philoſophers and literati. Had not a

Digitized by Google

fortunate combination of circumſtances drawn Newton from his ruſtic ſolitude, he would, perhaps, never have been any thing more than a farmer, in the pariſh of Colſterworth, and never have illuminated the world by his learned ſtudies and his ſublime diſcoveries. Without a lucky coincidence of cauſes, neither Nicholas IV. nor Sixtus V. would ever have aſcended the papal throne, nor Juſtinian or Baſil, that of Conſtantinople; and how many Newtons, Nicholas', Sixtus', Juſtinians and Bazils are there not, perhaps, at the preſent moment, in the loweſt ſtations and the moſt indigent circumſtances of humanity; how many ſuch, in all ages, have lived undiſtinguiſhed and ſunk into the grave unnoticed, without having met with any of thoſe ſingular coincidencies which drew from obſcurity thoſe favourites of fortune, and reſcued their names from oblivion.

These, however, are only a few of thoſe remarkable perſonages whoſe fortunes have been rendered illuſtrious, and their names immortal by a favourable combination of circumſtances, which ſeldom occurs, and without which they muſt, how great ſoever might have been their genius or talents, have lived and died undiſtinguiſhed and unknown. Hiſtory, in the long

Digitized by Google

ſucceſſion of ages which it exhibits to our view, affords a great number of ſimilar inſtances of perſons who have been raiſed from the loweſt to the moſt exalted ſtations, in which they have diſplayed the moſt ſplendid talents, and acted their parts with conſummate abilities and diſtinguiſhed reputation; and the number of thoſe who having thus been raiſed from indigence and obſcurity to wealth and eminence, have ſuſtained with dignity and eclat the character ſuitable to an exalted ſtation, affords us reaſon to conclude, that many others would have done the ſame, had they been fortunate enough to meet with the ſame favourable coincidencies.

In eſtimating the characters and abilities of men, we are not only to conſider what they have actually done, but what they might have performed in ſituations more or leſs favourable. In appreciating the character of a general, we are not to confine ourſelves to the contemplation of his victories, his conqueſts, and his triumphs, but to take into our eſtimate, the number, the courage, the military diſcipline and tactical ſkill of the forces with whom he had to contend, as well as of thoſe whom he commanded. Would we relatively appreciate the military achievements of Alexander and Cæſar, we muſt firſt compare

Digitized by Google

the Perſians and Gauls with each other, and then with the Greeks and Romans. And when we attempt to make a juſt eſtimate of a literary character, we ought not only to calculate the extent of his learning, but alſo to conſider his opportunities and means of acquiſition, and carefully diſtinguiſh between the innate qualities of the mind, and thoſe which are formed by a fortuitous combination of circumſtances. Both merit regard, but they ought to be diſtinguiſhed in order to form a true eſtimation, and fix our opinion.

It is often extremely difficult to make a juſt eſtimate of the characters and abilities of men by their ſucceſs in life. While we obſerve one, who beginning buſineſs with a ſmall capital raiſes himſelf by his exertions in trade, or agriculture, from poverty to affluence, we ſee another, at the ſame time, who apparently purſuing the ſame courſe, has very different ſucceſs, and is, without any ſtriking miſconduct, reduced from tolerable circumſtances to a ſtate of downright beggary. In the church and the army, ſome have riſen rapidly from obſcurity to eminence, while others, beginning their career with flattering proſpects, have remained ſtationary without any advancement to honour

Digitized by Google

and fame, and many, after having been raiſed to a high pitch of elevation, have experienced a ſudden and unexpected downfal. The hiſtories of all ages, and of all nations, abound with thoſe inſtances, and it is often extremely difficult, and ſometimes impoſſible, to decide whether miſfortune or miſmanagement be the cauſe of this variety of iſſue and diſparity of ſucceſs.

If the greatneſs of abilities be meaſured by that of the obſtacles, which have oppoſed themſelves in the way of their exertion, and over which they have triumphed, and the characters of men be appreciated by the difficulties they have ſurmounted, the moſt trying ſcenes of action preſent themſelves in the lower walks of life; and their conſtant ſucceſſion requires and frequently excites the greateſt exertions of intrepidity, fortitude, and patient perſeverance, of which human nature is capable. If the performances of perſons in the lower ſtations and common employments of life, to a ſuperficial obſerver appear eaſy, a more acute penetration will perceive that the ſmallneſs of the means often render them more difficult than the achievement of conqueſts and the ſubverſion of empires.

Digitized by Google

THERE appears to be in mankind a ſtrange propenſity to be dazzled with the glare of great characters, and the actions of eminent perſons, while the performance of more arduous taſks by thoſe of inferior note is not regarded. We admire the courage and conduct of celebrated warriors, but forget the bravery of thoſe by whoſe valour their victories were won, and their conqueſts achieved. When hiſtorians call upon us to admire the long and rapid marches of a Cæſar, or an Aurelian, ought we not alſo to contemplate the patient and perſevering fortitude of the legionary ſoldiers, who accompanied them in thoſe military movements, and without whoſe co-operation the activity and expedition of the leaders would have been of no utility? The privates of the Roman legions performed thoſe rapid and fatiguing marches under many circumſtances of diſadvantage, of which their commanders did not feel the galling preſſure. While theſe travelled on horſeback, the privates marched on foot, oppreſſed with the weight of their arms and neceſſary luggage, and while the Emperor retired to a ſplendid pavilion furniſhed with ſuitable accommodations, they were perhaps, after a ſcanty repaſt, obliged to repoſe themſelves on the ground in tents that would ſcarcely ſhelter them

Digitized by Google

from the inclemency of the weather. When we read of a Roman Emperor marching on foot, twenty miles a day, at the head of his troops, and find the greatneſs of the effort repreſented as a claim to applauſe and admiration, we are not to forget that the heavy armed legions marched on foot as well as he, with fewer conveniences in their route, and worſe accommodations at their halting places. Are we then to ſuppoſe a Roman Emperor a being of an inferior ſpecies, that we ſhould admire as an extraordinary exploit what every Roman ſoldier was able to perform, and every ordinary man eſteems an eaſy taſk: It is no very difficult performance to a man, who is in the vigour of his age, to walk twenty miles per day: moſt of our women can do this without any extraordinary effort.

It ſeems to be a common opinion, and a common error, that the fortitude and other qualifications of a great mind can be diſplayed only in dazzling exploits, and in the great tranſactions of life. An extraordinary degree of fortitude and perſevering exertion is very commonly exhibited among the lower orders of men, and the moſt trying difficulties are often experienced in the ordinary affairs of domeſtic

Digitized by Google

life. Many labouring peaſants undergo fatigues and hardſhips which few commanders of armies and conquerors of kingdoms have experienced, and day after day, and year after year, from youth to age, ſtruggle with difficulties that would have ſhaken the fortitude of many of the celebrated heroes of Greece and Rome.

However, as the eyes of mankind are ever fixed on the principal agents in every great and important tranſaction, eſpecially of a political or military nature, without beſtowing any great degree of attention on the ſubordinate actors, the reaſon of this univerſal propenſity conſtitutes an intereſting ſubject of enquiry; but the diſcuſſion will ſhow that it does not involve a problem of difficult ſolution. The habit of directing our obſervations towards thoſe characters, who, by their actions, their ſufferings, or their rank, have already acquired ſome degree of celebrity, or whom the appendages of greatneſs and power exhibit in an impoſing point of view, may contribute to the intereſt which we feel in the particular incidents of their hiſtory. This, however, is no more than a ſecondary cauſe proceeding from another of deeper root, and of a more decided as well as a

Digitized by Google

more rational operation. The primary cauſe exiſts in the univerſally acknowledged pre-eminence of mind over body. The heroiſm of the great, who poſſeſs the advantages of a liberal education, is conſidered as founded on reaſon and philoſophy, the only baſis of real magnanimity: the fortitude of the inferior claſſes generally originates in habit or inſenſibility; at the beſt, their courage is only conſtitutional, and would be wholly inadequate to the production of any great effect, were it not under the direction of ſuperior genius or more cultivated talents.

——————" While thus laborious crowds ply the rough " oar, philoſophy directs the ruling helm."

THOMSON.

IN contemplating an ingenious and complex piece of machinery, we immediately reflect on the ingenuity and ſkill of the mechaniſt, and are ready to admire that comprehenſion of thought which could embrace the whole plan of ſo complicated a work, and make all its movements to correſpond in perfect uniſon; but we never think of the inferior workmen who formed the wheels, and adjuſted the various parts under his direction. In like manner, when we view a magnificent ſtructure, our admiration is wholly turned towards the architect, whoſe compre-

Digitized by Google

henſive genius formed the general plan, adjuſted its proportions, and arranged its beautiful ſymmetry, while we ſeldom beſtow a thought on the ſtone hewers and maſons, who prepared the materials and raiſed the walls. In our views of political and military affairs, we act in a manner perfectly ſimilar: We conſider ſovereigns and commanders as the perſons whoſe ſuperior abilities form the great deſign, the people and the ſoldiery as inferior agents employed in carrying it into execution. The former diſplay, in the moſt conſpicuous manner, the powers of intellect; and mental ſuperiority is certainly the greateſt pre-eminence.

From what a man performs in any particular ſituation, it is not always eaſy to determine what figure he might make in another of a different nature. There are circumſtances, which, by ſtimulating the operation of particular paſſions or affections of the mind, may wind up courage to enthuſiaſm, depreſs it to puſillanimity, or ſink it into deſpair. That greatneſs of mind which conſtitutes real courage and rational fortitude, cannot be juſtly appreciated or clearly diſcriminated in the brilliant career of conqueſt, or amidſt the huzzas of an applauding multitude. The preſſure of adverſity affords the juſt criterion whereby it muſt be eſtimated.

Digitized by Google

almoſt unparalleled ſufferings than the wanderings of Commodore Biron, and his three companions, in the extenſive deſerts of South America. Such a ſituation was beyond compariſon, more difficult and diſtreſsful than moſt of thoſe of which hiſtory in its records of war and conqueſt exhibits ſuch finiſhed pictures. They had no preſent applauſe to buoy up their ſpirits, and little proſpect of future glory to ſtimulate their exertions. Their circumſtances were ſuch as might have almoſt totally excluded hope, and could ſcarcely afford any other expectation than that of periſhing in comfortleſs ſolitude in the boſom of thoſe immenſe and unknown wildernefſes. The poſſibility of preſerving life was the only conſideration that could animate and ſupport them ſo long under the preſſure of circumſtances, difficult and perilous almoſt beyond example.

SELF-PRESERVATION is undoubtedly of all human conſiderations the moſt powerful ſtimulous to exertion, and that which communicates the ſtrongeſt as well as the ſuddeneſt impulſe; but its operation is not of ſuch a nature as to annex pleaſure to exertion, to inſpire exhilerating ideas, to ſweeten toil, to raiſe flattering expectations, to preſent agreeable images to the

Digitized by Google

mind, and inſpire it with that enthuſiaſtic ardour which exciting a contempt of danger, renders hardſhips eaſy to bear and obſtacles eaſy to ſurmount. The man who makes an extraordinary effort through the motive. of ſelf-preſervation, does not act with that enthuſiaſm and exhilerating ſatisfaction of mind, which is felt by one who is impelled by a deſire of raiſing himſelf to eminence, and immortaliſing his name. The exertions impoſed by neceſſity are leſs agreeable, and therefore more difficult than thoſe which proceed from choice: the former tend to depreſs, the latter to elevate the mind. Here alſo we may perhaps diſcover another reaſon why the exertions made by great and conſpicuous characters, and perſons in the higher ranks of life, attract admiration and applauſe much more than thoſe of the inferior orders; we ſuppoſe the former to act from nobler motives, and to model their conduct upon nobler principles. Imperious neceſſity obliges numbers of the lower claſſes of mankind to undergo hardſhips, to ſurmount difficulties, and expoſe themſelves to dangers for the ſake of procuring ſubſiſtence, and the idea of neceſſity generally, although not juſtly, excludes that of merit.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVII.

ON THE SAME.

IN every eſtimation of character, the combination of circumſtances, which contributed to its formation, ought to be carefully obſerved, and accurately inveſtigated, and the influence of each particular circumſtance duly examined and weighed; and we ought to be equally attentive to the conſiderations that might induce cotemporary or ſucceeding writers to exhibit it in a more or leſs attractive and impoſing point of view.

WHEN we ſee a great man extolled to the ſkies by the hiſtorians of his own nation, we ought alſo to inquire in what eſtimation his character is held by foreigners, and collect the teſtimony and opinions of friends and enemies, before we come to a concluſion. We ought eſpecially to conſider the complexion of the times, in which he acquired his power or his reputation, and of thoſe immediately ſucceeding, in order to determine whether his fame be

Digitized by Google

owing to his ſucceſs or due to his merit. Above all we muſt attentively obſerve the circumſtances of his ſituation, and endeavour to inveſtigate the motives that might actuate his conduct. This indeed muſt be a principal conſideration in appreciating the characters of men both in public and private life, a general rule which admits of no exception. It is only by obſerving theſe rules, that our minds can penetrate through the clouds of miſrepreſentation, under which character is generally exhibited. Ignorance and partiality often form a diſtorted picture, which bears little reſemblance to the original; and general opinion, once fixed, is eaſily perpetuated. It is only by diveſting ourſelves of all prejudice, by caſting off every bias to praiſe or cenſure, by comparing means with ends, and actions with motives, that truth can be inveſtigated and a right judgment formed.

Of thoſe characters which make the moſt conſpicuous figure in the hiſtories of ancient or modern times, ſome are exhibited to the world under the impoſing titles of heroes, philoſophers, or ſaints, while others are repreſented as tyrants, impoſtors, or libertines. Sometimes the deſignation is juſtly appropriated, ſometimes erroneouſly

Digitized by Google

applied, and the voice of one age re-echoing that of another, affixes to their names marks of eſteem, or ſtigmas of infamy, and often tranſmits to the lateſt poſterity unmerited applauſe or cenſure.

In reading the Roman hiſtory, we are accuſtomed to contemplate with admiration the ſplendid talents and military achievements of Julius Cæſar; but he is alſo exhibited to our view as the man who overturned the conſtitution, and extinguiſhed the liberty of his country. If we take the pains, however, to examine the nature of this boaſted Roman liberty, we ſhall find that it was little more than a mixture of civil anarchy and domeſtic ſlavery. Under the name of a republic and the oftenſible forms of a popular government, Rome had ever ſince the expulſion of their Kings been oppreſſed by the deſpotiſm of the ſenate, in whoſe hands the people were no more than paſſive inſtruments, and from the time of Sylla, the ſenate itſelf was frequently overruled by factious demagogues, who rendered both the ſenatorial authority and the popular power ſubſervient to their own ambition. The hiſtory of the republic diſplays a confuſed ſcene of patrician tyranny and plebeian licentiouſneſs, which ſhows that the condition of the people

Digitized by Google

could ſcarcely be made worſe by any change of government. And Cæſar ſtands accuſed of ſubverting the liberty of Rome, when liberty no longer exiſted, and licentiouſneſs had aſſumed its name; when corruption pervaded every department of the ſtate, and the republic was alternately oppreſſed by the tyranny of deſpotiſm, and convulſed by the exploſions of anarchy.

In peruſing the hiſtory of this celebrated man, and the complexion of the times in which he lived, it is eaſy to perceive that his ſituation was ſuch that he muſt either riſe or fall: he could not long have remained ſtationary. In appreciating his character, we muſt not, however, forget that he was the idol of the people, as Pompey was of the ſenate; and under his dictatorſhip the Romans were happier than they had been under the former ſyſtem, rent with factions and harraſſed with inteſtine commotions. The conſpirators who aſſaſſinated him in the ſenate made the cauſe of liberty their pretext: but their real motive probably aroſe from ſeeing their own power abridged and their influence diminiſhed by his authority. The univerſal conſternation which pervaded Rome on the intelligence of his aſſaſſination, and the execrations which the

Digitized by Google

inhabitants of that immenſe metropolis poured forth againſt the conſpirators, who had no other reſource than a precipitate flight to eſcape the vindictive fury of an incenſed people, are circumſtances which demonſtrate that the great majority of the Romans did not regard Cæſar as a tyrant, and that they had found the tranquillity of a monarchical government preferable to the turbulence of a republic.

Octavius Cæsar, ſurnamed Auguſtus, ſtands diſtinguiſhed in hiſtory as one of the greateſt politicians that ever undertook the taſk of governing mankind; but he is at the ſame time repreſented by ſeveral writers, and conſidered by ſeveral readers, as the perſon who completed the overthrow of liberty at Rome, and rivetted on the Romans thoſe fetters which his uncle Julius had forged. If, however, we regard things rather than names, and take facts as a baſis of reaſoning, we ſhall not heſitate to conclude that his reign was the happieſt epoch which Rome had ever ſeen. Auguſtus, indeed, muſt be claſſed among the benefactors of mankind, if we contraſt the previous circumſtances of the Romans with their condition under his government.

Digitized by Google

Mr. Aikin ſays, that "a perſon cannot have ſurveyed mankind with an attentive eye, without perceiving, in many caſes, ſuch an irreſiſtible ſeries of cauſes, operating in the formation of character, as muſt convince him of the actual exiſtence of a moral neceſſity, that is of ſuch a preponderancy of motives tending to one point that in no one inſtant of a man's life, could he be ſuppoſed capable of a courſe of action different from that which he has already adopted." Whether this argument be true in its utmoſt latitude, or in what extent and with what limitations it may be admitted by different philoſophers the advocates or the opponents of the doctrine of moral neceſſity, are points not eaſy to determine. In regard to the affairs of nations hiſtory would incline us to think it admiſſible in its fulleſt extent, and individual experience would alſo lead us to adopt the affirmative ſide of the queſtion. Motives of action are often but ſlightly examined, but if our own can be perfectly recollected and fully inveſtigated, we ſhall find that they have generally originated from combinations of circumſtances of which the influence was uncontroulable.

If we had an opportunity of examining with accuracy the characters and conduct of thoſe men

Digitized by Google

who have been diſtinguiſhed by their ſucceſſes or their misfortunes, their virtues or their crimes, we ſhould perceive that they were actuated by motives, which in their times and in their ſituations might appear in a light very different from that in which they would be contemplated at this day. To make a juſt eſtimation of human actions, we muſt place ourſelves in the ſituation of the actors. The conduct of men of every rank and in every ſtation is determined by particular intereſts and views, predominant inclinations, or imperious circumſtances.

The characters and conduct of Henry II. and his inflexible opponent, Archbiſhop Becket, ſo far as relates to their celebrated conteſt, have not, perhaps, been clearly repreſented by hiſtorians, nor juſtly eſtimated by many of their readers. The conduct of the Archbiſhop is always exhibited as a complete ſpecimen of over-bearing haughtineſs and unparalleled obſtinacy. Of theſe imputations, that celebrated prelate cannot, indeed, be exculpated by the voice of impartial judgment. The cauſe he undertook, however grounded on canonical inſtitutions and eſtabliſhed cuſtoms, was in the eye of reaſon and morality unjuſt; but conſiderable allowances are to be made for the times in which he lived. That was an age in

Digitized by Google

which the church was in the zenith of its power, and high church notions prevailed in their fulleſt amplification and greateſt extent. The exaltation of the eccleſiaſtical above the ſecular authority was the favourite maxim of the clergy, and the principal object in the view of the dignitaries of the church. Ambition was Becket's ruling paſſion, ſuperiority and fame the objects of his purſuit. He had inliſted under the banners of the church, and was determined to ſupport the intereſts, maintain the prerogatives, and increaſe, or at leaſt confirm the authority and influence of the party he had eſpouſed. This he did with an inflexible courage and a perſevering reſolution, which, in ſuch a cauſe were, in that age, calculated to procure him diſtinction and celebrity. The honours with which he was received on the continent, are demonſtrations of the high eſteem in which his undaunted fortitude was held. His ſentiments and ideas naturally elevated, ſeem to have been ſomewhat influenced by the bigotry of the times, but his views were grand and extenſive. He occupied the ſecond ſtation in the kingdom, and could not bear the controul even of royalty. His ambition prompted him to render the regal power ſubſervient to his own authority. Martyrdom was in thoſe ages thought

Digitized by Google

the higheſt honour, and he was leſs deſirous of avoiding the ſufferings than of obtaining the glory. In his whole hiſtory, ſetting prejudice aſide, we diſcover the great man, although we cannot avoid lamenting the perverſion of ſuch ſplendid talents to ſuch pernicious purpoſes. A dauntleſs courage, an inflexible perſeverance, elevated ideas, and a determined reſolution joined to a boundleſs ambition, conſtituted his character; and his mind was evidently formed by nature for every thing that was great. The circumſtances of the times unfortunately gave to his great abilities a wrong direction; and he ruſhed upon his fate, after having employed a turbulent life in diſturbing the tranquillity of the kingdom as well as of the church.

If the obſtinacy of Becket has been generally reprobated, the conduct of Henry in doing penance in ſo humiliating a manner at the tomb of his enemy, and the diſturber of his reign, has not eſcaped the cenſure of poſterity. But it muſt be acknowledged, that this act of Henry, how great or how little ſoever a part his conſcience had in it, was a piece of ſound policy well adapted to the ſpirit of the times; and he experienced its beneficial effects. It regained him the favour of the Pope, exculpated him in

Digitized by Google

the eyes of the world, averted the thunders of excommunication in that age ſo terrible, and aſſured to him the affections of his ſubjects. Such a conduct would, in this age, be abſurd; but it was perfectly adapted to the times in which he lived. In theſe days it would excite ridicule: in the twelfth century it attracted admiration and applauſe.

In the ſimple concerns of private life, right and wrong are terms of which the meaning is in a great meaſure fixed and invariable, eaſily defined and appropriated; but in the complicated caſes ariſing from the influence of ſyſtems, political or religious, and the prevalence of current opinions, they vary with the complexion of the times and the variation of circumſtances. What one age applauds another ridicules and condemns: many of the general ideas, current opinions, and eſtabliſhed cuſtoms of our anceſtors, many of their modes of thinking and acting incur our diſapprobation and cenſure; and perhaps not a few of ours will be ſubjects of ridicule to poſterity. In all caſes, when we make an eſtimation of the characters and conduct of men, the circumſtances of the times in which they lived, as well as thoſe of their particular

Digitized by Google

ſituation, and all the whole aggregate of particulars, which influenced their ſphere of action, ought to conſtitute a principal ſubject of conſideration. This is the ſtandard by which we muſt, in a great meaſure, regulate our judgment, the luminary that muſt direct our underſtanding in theſe diſquiſitions.

It is impoſſible to make a juſt eſtimate of actions without being acquainted with the motives by which they are prompted; and theſe are often extremely difficult to inveſtigate. It is therefore no wonder that we ſhould often be liable to miſtake. The moſt hazardous enterpriſes, the moſt daring flights of ambition, and the moſt brilliant achievements are ſometimes the effects of neceſſity rather than of choice. A difficult ſituation frequently impoſes thoſe taſks which would not otherwiſe be voluntarily undertaken; and exploits which obtain our applauſe as well as crimes, which excite our abhorrence, are ſometimes owing rather to imperious circumſtances than to the virtuous or vicious inclinations of the agents in ſuch tranſactions. Unavoidable conſequences reſult from certain ſituations. In admiring the ſucceſsful raſhneſs of Cortez, it muſt alſo be conſidered, that had he not achieved the conqueſt of Mexico, he would have been

Digitized by Google

reconducted to Cuba as a priſoner, and tried as a rebel; and in contemplating with horror the civil wars, the treaſons and uſurpations which have ſo frequently happened among the Princes of the houſe of Tamerlane, as well as among the other deſpots of Aſia, it muſt be remembered, that moſt of them were ſo circumſtanced as to have no other alternative than the throne or the ſcaffold. Such has been the critical ſituation of many diſtinguiſhed perſons, as neceſſarily to produce great ſucceſſes or great misfortunes; but in every eſtimation of conduct and character, the whole aſſemblage of exiſting circumſtances muſt be taken into the account.

Biography, which if perfect, would be not only the moſt entertaining but alſo the moſt valuable department of hiſtory, is of all others, the moſt erroneous and defective. Thoſe works which are profeſſedly biographical, are generally little better than a tiſſue of miſrepreſentations and miſtakes, the unmerited panegyrics of friends, or the malevolent cenſures of enemies. Theſe defects are almoſt inſeparable from biographical relations, unleſs a perſon undertake to be his own biographer; when he does this, indeed, we cannot doubt of the likeneſs of the picture if we can rely on the painter's fidelity. A very trifling

Digitized by Google

degree of attention to the multitudinous maſs of miſrepreſentation, always abroad in the world, will ſuffice to convince us of the difficulty of procuring correct information relative to the private characters of our cotemporaries. If a perſon ſhould undertake to delineate a biographical picture of his own neighbourhood, he could ſcarcely do more than exhibit correct outlines: the ſhades and colouring would be in a great meaſure the work of fancy or the reſult of miſinformation. Few men acquaint their friends or their neighbours with their private concerns, with the moſt intereſting occurrences of their lives, with their particular views, and the ſecret motives of their conduct. The general practice of mankind, on the contrary, is to conceal, as much as poſſible, from the public eye, thoſe particulars which conſtitute the nicer ſhades of character; and it is only from common report, which is for the moſt part falſe, that they are enregiſtered in the chronicles of the biographer. An intimate acquaintance with theſe ſhades and colours, however, is abſolutely neceſſary, in order to complete the moral and intellectual picture. If this knowledge be ſo difficult to attain in reſpect of our cotemporaries and neighbours, it can ſcarcely be expected that the portraits, which hiſtory furniſhes, ſhould be exact

Digitized by Google

reſemblances. It is therefore only by examining actions in connexion with the manners and opinions of different ages and countries, and the whole combination of influencing circumſtances, that motives can be traced, the views of men developed, and their characters appreciated.

Digitized by Google

ESSAY XVIII.

ON THE KNOWLEDGE OF MANKIND.

OF all the ſubjects of human inveſtigation, the knowledge of mankind is of the moſt general utility: It is even indiſpenſably neceſſary, unleſs we would ſequeſter ourſelves from the world, and in the ſolitude of an anchorite renounce all intercourſe with the human ſpecies. We have already made ſome remarks on the deductions and allowances that ought to be made, and the circumſtantial modifications that ought to be admitted, in forming our judgment of the conduct and characters of thoſe men who have made a conſpicuous figure in life, and attracted the notice of cotemporaries or of poſterity.

But what is more generally underſtood by the knowledge of mankind, is the facility of diſcovering the inclinations, the diſpoſitions, and intereſts of thoſe with whom we mix in the various connexions of buſineſs or pleaſure,

Digitized by Google

and of penetrating into the motives the moſt likely to actuate their conduct in the various circumſtances of ſocial intercourſe.

KNOWLEDGE of the world is a term uſed by many to ſignify ſome acquaintance with polite life, with the faſhionable circles, the public amuſements, and the buſy idleneſs of the town. The mind, however, which confines its obſervations and ideas within the ſphere of what is called the polite world, acquires a knowledge of mankind ſomewhat ſimilar to that of the cloyſtered monk, who ſees human nature only as it is modified within the walls of a monaſtery, ſhackled by vows and regulated by preſcribed rules, and who inſpired with a contempt for temporal purſuits, views only one particular ſcene of exiſtence, exhibited under various reſtrictions and adventitious modifications, and diſregards the varied buſtle of the active world from which he is ſequeſtered by the ſanctity of vows, and ſeparated by the walls of his ſacred retirement.

THE real characters of men can be known only by their general conduct in life, and their deportment in domeſtic privacy, and not by the

Digitized by Google

appearance which they aſſume in public. We muſt follow them to their accompting-houſes, to their ſhops, to their farms, and not to their feaſts, their entertainments, and aſſemblies, where they act under a reſtraint and exhibit themſelves in maſquerade. The gay, the jovial companion who ſhows himſelf to the greateſt advantage at a public entertainment, or convivial meeting, when enlivening ſociety and the cheerful glaſs rouſe his torpid powers, is often the dulleſt, the ſurlieſt, and moſt melancholy being upon earth, in the ſedateneſs of retirement and the ſcenes of domeſtic life.

The knowledge of mankind in the detail is not leſs uſeful than a general knowledge of human nature; but it is an experimental and practical ſcience, not a ſpeculative theory. A general knowledge of the human character may, in ſome meaſure, be acquired by reading and reflection; but to inveſtigate the actuating motives, the views, the intereſts and paſſions of individuals, and the operations of their impulſes, in connexion with various peculiarities of ſituation, requires a great accuracy of remark and depth of penetration. Every one is acquainted with the nature and general operation of the human paſſions; but it is not eaſy to know in

Digitized by Google

what manner any particular one will operate in every mind, and under every poſſible combination of circumſtances. Perſons, who from the influence of various contingencies, have formed different aſſociations of ideas, act in a very different manner under the impulſe of the ſame paſſion. Ambition, in different perſons, gives riſe to views and deſires ſo exceedingly diſſimilar, that it is almoſt impoſſible to diſcover that they originate from the ſame ſource. The actions of men, however impelled by paſſion, are in a great meaſure modelled by habit; and habits are formed from previouſly exiſting circumſtances. Of all the paſſions, avarice, if genuine, is perhaps the moſt uniform in its operation, and is generally eſteemed the moſt diſtinguiſhable in its effects. What is attributed to its operation may, however, many times, originate from a different cauſe, and be the effect of a paſſion of a very different nature. We ſee a perſon intent on hoarding up money, and immediately pronounce him avaricious; but perhaps we know nothing of the matter on which we make ſo haſty and poſitive a deciſion. Perhaps we are totally ignorant of the motives of his conduct. Do we certainly know whether he be actuated by the love of money or the

Digitized by Google

love of independence, by a laudable pride which inſpires him with a deſire of raiſing himſelf above that ſtate of humiliating inferiority, which in the eſtimation of the world is always annexed to indigence. If the ſubject of our obſervation have a wife and children, how can we diſcriminate between an inordinate attachment to the poſſeſſion of riches, and an exceſs of conjugal and parental affection. He caſts his eyes on his riſing family, conſiſting, perhaps, of a numerous offspring, and with anxious concern for their welfare, anticipates the period when they muſt launch into a world in which wants are multiplied, and poverty is regarded with contempt. But perhaps he is already bleſſed with affluence, and cannot have any ground of apprehenſion for the future proſperity of his family: When, therefore, he is ſeen ſtrenuouſly endeavouring, with unremitted efforts, to augment his wealth, the ſuperficial obſerver and reaſoner immediately thinks himſelf authoriſed to conſider avarice as his predominant paſſion. It is not impoſſible however, that ambition alone may actuate his conduct. He may perhaps have in contemplation ſome great project, which cannot be accompliſhed without an enormous expence; and this ſingle conſideration may poſſibly be that which determines the whole plan of his pecu-

Digitized by Google

niary arrangements, which ſtimulates him to acquiſition, and reſtrains him from diſſipation. If it be conſidered that money is the only means of ſatisfying all the demands of pride, and of accompliſhing all the projects of ambition, as well as of gratifying the inclinations of avarice, it requires no extraordinary degree of penetration to diſcover that the modes in which theſe different paſſions operate, are ſo complicated, and blended together as not to admit of an eaſy diſcrimination.

If avarice be a term applied in a poſitive and abſolute ſenſe to the love of money for the ſake of itſelf, without a reference to ſome other object, although the world may afford ſome inſtances of individuals in whom this abſurdity of ideas and ſentiments appears to exiſt, yet an accurate obſerver of human nature, who can analyze the operations of the mind, trace its ideas, and diſcriminate the effects of the different paſſions, will readily conclude that the number of avaricious perſons in this acceptation of the term muſt be extremely few. It is, indeed, ſcarcely poſſible to conceive how the mere poſſeſſion of money, without any reference to its uſe, can afford much gratification to the mind; but when it is conſidered in conjunction with its various

Digitized by Google

relations of utility the difficulty vaniſhes. Thoſe even who ſeem to delight in the poſſeſſion without the enjoyment of wealth, and in the midſt of affluence deny themſelves all the comforts and even the neceſſaries of life, derive their ſatisfaction from the pleaſing reflections excited by ideas of compariſon. Their riches compared with thoſe of their more indigent neighbours, preſent to their minds the poſſibility of procuring thoſe comforts which others leſs opulent are not able to obtain; and the power of enjoying even without actual enjoyment is pleaſing. In all caſes, indeed, how little delight ſoever is taken in the exerciſe of power, the conſciouſneſs of poſſeſſing it is always agreeable to the mind.

To know with certainty in what manner different minds are affected by the ſame paſſions or the ſame conſiderations, it would be requiſite to be acquainted not only with their conſtitutional texture and ideal aſſociations, but alſo with all the external circumſtances that can influence their notions and ſentiments; but the aſſemblage forms a tiſſue of indication too complex to be eaſily unravelled. It is not more difficult to diſtinguiſh, in many caſes, the love of money in the common acceptation of the term from that of

Digitized by Google

ſome other object which money may be conſidered as the means of obtaining, than to judge of the impreſſions which love, grief, pride, or reſentment may make on minds poſſeſſing different degrees of ſenſibility, and influenced by different habits and modes of thinking reſulting from a variety of previous or preſent cauſes.

As the knowledge of mankind, in common life, depends on long experience and accurate obſervation, it cannot be acquired from books alone, and conſequently, without ſome further aſſiſtance than they can afford, youth muſt enter on the theatre of action totally ignorant of a ſcience daily and indiſpenſably neceſſary in their intercourſe with ſociety. Parents therefore, whom experience has taught the uſeful leſſon, ought to teach it to their children, and communicate to them ſome knowledge of the world, before they find themſelves obliged to take an active part in its variegated ſcenes. In the inſtructions given to youth, there ſeems however to be in this reſpect an almoſt general defect, which is frequently productive of conſequences extremely pernicious and ſometimes fatal. We endeavour to inſpire them with ſentiments of virtue, which is indeed an indiſpenſable requiſite in forming the mind, and ought to be the primary

Digitized by Google

object of all juvenile inſtruction. We ſeem, however, in a great meaſure, to conceal from their knowledge the exiſtence of vice; and yet it muſt certainly be developed, in order to ſhow its deformity. After all our endeavours to withdraw the eyes of youth from contemplating the picture of a profligate world, vice and folly actually exiſt and cannot be concealed from their view. Even during the period of tutorage, hiſtory will diſplay an almoſt continued ſeries of crimes; and a newſpaper cannot be read, without making them acquainted with inſtances of robbery, theft, fraud, elopements, ſeduction, and a variety of other examples of criminality. As all theſe circumſtances will ruſh on the obſervation of youth, parental prudence ought to call the attention to theſe effects of human depravity, paint their deformity, and point out their conſequences. Were it poſſible entirely to conceal from youth the exhibition of vice, no good purpoſe could thereby be attained; the world, at their entrance on its theatre, would convince them of its exiſtence, allure them with a fallacious view of its pernicious pleaſures, and furniſh them with examples for imitation.

The firſt thing requiſite for the avoiding or the reſiſting of danger, is to be convinced of its

Digitized by Google

exiſtence and warned of its approach; and to be acquainted with its nature and extent is neceſſary, in order to proportion the means of defence to thoſe of attack. If it were practicable to prevent a young perſon from having any idea of the vices and follies that every where prevail, the conſequence would be that entering, perhaps, all at once into the world, he would find himſelf launched into an unknown ocean, and totally unacquainted with the rocks and ſhoals which every where ſurround him, and every moment threaten him with ſhipwreck. How, indeed, can a perſon who has never viewed the world but on the favourable ſide, be on his guard againſt thoſe fraudulent practices which mankind almoſt every where exerciſe towards one another? How ſhall he ſecure his property from depredation, or his morals from the contagion of evil example? A young man thus entering on the ſtage of active life, ignorant of the too general prevalence of vice, and of the duplicity of mankind, becomes the dupe of every one who is crafty enough to take advantage of his ſimplicity; and a young woman who is in the ſame predicament, falls a victim to the firſt ſeducer who conſiders her as an object worthy of his attention.

Digitized by Google

A YOUNG perſon thus permitted to remain ignorant of what is every day met with in the world, until the period when experience ſometimes, indeed to his coſt, muſt correct his want of information, finds it ſcarcely poſſible to reſiſt the influence of bad examples. He carries along with him into ſociety the ideas which he has imbibed from leſſons of virtue unmixed with exhibitions of vice, and is ſurpriſed on diſcovering that the world ſo little reſembles the picture which he had formed of it in his imagination. He ſees a ſyſtem of manners and modes of thinking and acting ſo very different from what he had expected, that he begins to conſider his former ideas as nothing better than a tiſſue of antiquated notions in no reſpect adapted to the intercourſe of life. The companions of his hours of recreation ſoon laugh him out of his former principles. To theſe he endeavours to recommend himſelf by ſhaking off what he deems the prejudices of his childhood, and it frequently happens that at laſt he is plunged into the depths of vice, and reduced to a level with thoſe who have been educated within the precincts of St. Giles's, and initiated in all the myſteries of vice and profligacy.

THE exhibition of vice, when arrayed in its genuine colours, and in connexion with its

Digitized by Google

baleful conſequences, cannot tend to vitiate juvenile ideas. On the contrary, the monſter, by being diveſted of its borrowed robes, and ſhown in its naked deformity, would make on the youthful mind an impreſſion that would not be eaſily eraſed, and prevent the formation of thoſe falſe and pernicious ideas which reſult from ſeeing it exhibited for the firſt time under the fallacious appearances which it often aſſumes. Would it not therefore be much better that it ſhould be diſplayed in contraſt with virtue, its nature defined, where decency permits, and its fatal tendency pointed out, that ſo youth being made acquainted with its exiſtence, and appriſed of its conſequences, might avoid its ſnares, inſtead of ruſhing upon dangers unſeen and unſuſpected, and thus falling the victims of duplicity or pernicious example. The want of this previous information, and theſe neceſſary cautions, appears to be the principal cauſe of the numerous inſtances of children virtuouſly educated, who, at their firſt entrance into the world, inconſiderately plunge into all its vices and follies.

Of all the various kinds of knowledge that can be inveſtigated by ſtudy, or acquired by

Digitized by Google

experience, that of mankind is certainly the moſt difficult, the moſt variegated, and the moſt extenſively ramified. It is as various as the paſſions, the circumſtances, and views of individuals, and its progreſs and operations are impeded by the impenetrability of their deſigns. From the experience of thoſe who are hackneyed in the ways of the world, youth may obtain the information that is neceſſary for the regulation of practice in all ordinary caſes; but the mind is an intricate labyrinth, often impoſſible to be explored, and the knowledge of mankind will ever be an uncertain ſcience, and liable to a variety of miſtakes.

It ſeems not unreaſonable to think that perſons who are placed in an elevated ſtation, have not ſo favourable an opportunity of acquiring the knowledge of mankind, as thoſe whom their deſtiny has fixed in the middle claſs of ſociety, and who are ſo circumſtanced as to be occaſionally converſant with perſons both of a ſuperior and an inferior rank. The great, whenever accident may give them an opportunity of contemplating the manners and characters of the lower claſſes, view them under the fallacious colouring of an artificial diſguiſe. On ſuch occaſions, the inferior endeavours, as much as

Digitized by Google

poſſible, to aſſume the appearance of a different perſon from what he is: he ſpeaks as his ſuperior ſpeaks, and ſtrives to make him believe that he thinks alſo as he does; but when the interview is over, and the former returns into his own circle, he is then himſelf again, and his words, his actions, and even his propenſities lie open to inſpection. The moſt advantageous poſt that can be occupied by a curious obſerver of human nature, is a ſtation not ſo highly elevated as to induce thoſe with whom he converſes, to diſſemble their ſentiments, and aſſume a borrowed character, nor yet ſo abject as to exclude him from the privilege of mixing occaſionally with different ranks of ſociety. His ſituation in life ſhould be ſufficiently reſpectable to procure him admiſſion among different claſſes of people, but not ſo exalted as to deter them from declaring their opinions, diſplaying their talents, expoſing their prejudices, and betraying their weakneſſes. Without a conſiderable degree of familiarity with men, it is impoſſible to obtain a knowledge of their diſpoſitions, to penetrate their views, to inveſtigate their characters, and trace the picture of their minds.

If the lower or middle ſtations of life be more favourable to the inveſtigation of the

Digitized by Google

characters of men than thoſe which are more exalted, it muſt, however, be confeſſed that thoſe who are placed in them are often deſtitute of the abilities neceſſary for accurate obſervation. On the contrary, perſons of a diſtinguiſhed rank, having in general had a better education, and being more accuſtomed to habits of reflection, poſſeſs a greater degree of penetration than thoſe who are of an inferior claſs. This may, therefore, in ſome meaſure, bring the matter to a balance, or even caſt the ſcale in favour of the obſerver of rank and eminence, in whom ſuperior abilities, juſtneſs of diſcernment, and a general knowledge of human nature, may, in a great meaſure, compenſate the want of intercourſe with the lower orders of the people.

To acquire a complete knowledge of the world, a perſon muſt obſerve the manners of the country as well as of the town, of the cottage as well as of the palace. The great Dr. Johnſon very ſagaciouſly obſerves, that "The true ſtate of every nation is the ſtate of common life. The manners of a people are not to be found in the ſchools of learning, or the palaces of greatneſs, where the national character is obſcured or obliterated by travel or inſtruction, by philoſophy or vanity, nor is public happineſs to be

Digitized by Google

eſtimated by the aſſemblies of the gay, or the banquets of the rich. The great maſs of nations is neither rich nor gay. They whoſe aggregate conſtitutes the people, are found in the ſtreets and the villages, the ſhops and the farms, and from them collectively conſidered, muſt the meaſure of public or general proſperity be taken." And we may add of public manners alſo; for theſe obſervations are equally applicable to the public character as to public felicity.

It is with many a favourite notion, that they are able at the firſt ſight to form an accurate judgment of a perſon's character; and in conſequence of that ſuppoſition make, at the firſt interview, their eſtimate of his abilities, and ſometimes even of his natural diſpoſition. Some may perhaps be endowed with an extraordinary degree of penetration, and an accuracy of obſervation which is very far from being general; but whatever acuteneſs a perſon may poſſeſs, this precipitancy of judging muſt very frequently expoſe him to the hazard of miſtake. He will very often find character in contradiction to phyſiognomical indications, and all the rules of a Lavater inſufficient for the direction of his opinion. To explore the receſſes of the human mind, and inveſtigate the complexity of thought

Digitized by Google

is no eaſy taſk. A man is frequently ſeen in ſuch a ſituation as affords nothing that can either excite his paſſions or call his talents, whatever they may be, into exertion. He may be engaged in converſation, but the topics may be ſo unimportant as to offer him no opportunity of diſplaying his knowledge, or diſtinguiſhing himſelf from thoſe who are beyond compariſon his inferiors, in reſpect of intellectual powers, ſcientific ſkill, or literary acquirements. In forming our opinions in this reſpect, we ought to make juſt allowances for the circumſtances in which a man is placed, and the incidental conſiderations by which his converſation and behaviour may be influenced and actuated. This, however, is often extremely difficult: we ſeldom know the impulſes which operate on his mind, determine his conduct, and give a particular caſt to his converſation. It is indeed impoſſible to diſcover the impreſſions that may at any particular moment be made on a perſon's mind, by a thouſand circumſtances with which we are totally unacquainted. The ſame man who at one time is remarked for his vivacity, may, at another, appear dull and languid in converſation, through cauſes which we have not the means of inveſtigating. To eſtimate the extent of his knowledge, and the meaſure of

Digitized by Google

his intellectual powers we muſt ſee his talents brought forward to our inſpection by various kinds of converſation; and to become acquainted with his diſpoſition and general character, it is neceſſary to be upon terms of familiarity with him for ſome length of time, and to obſerve his behaviour in a variety of circumſtances. With theſe advantages it is not difficult to draw a rough ſketch of his mind, and the outlines of his character; but to obtain a finiſhed picture exhibiting the nicer diſcriminations of light and ſhade, reſulting from the operation of an infinity of cauſes, requires a degree of ſagacity and penetration which every one cannot be ſuppoſed to poſſeſs.

END OF VOL. I.

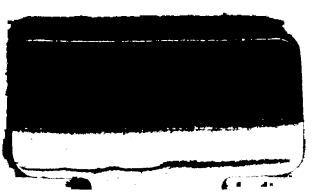
Digitized by Google

Printed by W. Sheardown,
High-ſtreet, Doncaſter.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google